

**SARI will be holding its 18th international conference on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> May 2025 at the Université Sorbonne Paris Nord on the theme of *Indian cinema and the Representation of Justice*.**

The *Société d'Activités et de Recherches sur les mondes Indiens* will be organizing various events (study days, seminars, and conferences) throughout 2025 and 2026 around the theme of "Representation of justice".

The first event in this series will take place on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> May 2025 in the form of an interdisciplinary and international conference on the representation of justice in Indian cinema.

### **CALL FOR PAPERS: INDIAN CINEMA AND THE REPRESENTATION OF JUSTICE**

Indian society has undergone radical transformation over the last century, characterized by two closely related phenomena: rapid change (urbanization, rise of communitarianism, growth of new classes) and the collapse of older structures (law and order, feudalism, caste and class).

Aside from the complexity of these changes, three dates have left a lasting mark on the country: 1947, the year of independence and the partition of India and Pakistan; 1971, the year Bangladesh became an independent country; and 1992, the year of the destruction of the Babri mosque. In many ways, society changed fundamentally after these historic years. The buoyancy and the idea of progress in the nation building of the post-independence period eroded gradually as materialism, corruption and complacency became commonplace in politics, alongside an overall decline of social ideals.

The suspension of fundamental rights during the period of Emergency from 1975 to 1977 in India struck a blow to the confidence of the people in the state as a guardian (*mai-baap sarkar*). The emergence of corrupt politicians and underground mafia, both of whom made a mockery of the rule of law in India, further reinforced the distrust.

The rise of Hindu nationalism over the last century has especially marked politics, academia, arts and society at large, giving new significations to "traditional" values and bringing about a form of denigration of "modern" values in political and social discourses. The destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992 changed the very "idea of India"<sup>1</sup>, the national ideal promulgated by the founders of the independent state, based on the idea of "secularism", with the official recognition of different religious communities and the "organic pluralism"<sup>2</sup> in the coexistence of communities in practice.

With the opening up of the economy to international finance in 1991, its demography, and its strategic positioning in certain industries (entertainment, pharmacy, services, tourism, etc.), India has gained influence on the international scene in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Functioning as a barometer, Indian arts reflect the evolution and developments in the society. Cinema, a popular medium since its arrival in the country, abhorred and decried by certain sections of the society, had a certain vocation to convey the idea of progress. Some films were made possible due to funding by government agencies such as the National Film Development Corporation which encouraged excellence in film making as well as the emergence of "parallel" (non-commercial) cinema.

India is one of the leading countries in terms of film production. The Hyderabad, Chennai, Mumbai and Kolkata studios are among the largest in terms of the volume of production of films in different Indian

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<sup>1</sup> Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Lachman Khubchandani, *Revisualizing Boundaries. A Plurilingual Ethos*, Delhi, Sage Publications, 1997, p. 98.

languages<sup>3</sup>. Cinema has a certain influence on contemporary social and linguistic practices<sup>4</sup>, on the marriage market economy, and on consumption styles, such as fashion, food, travel and tourism, etc.

The arrival of new technologies (television, multimedia, video-on-demand sites, Internet platforms with or without paid subscriptions) in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has somewhat diminished the popularity and attendance of cinema theatres. At the same time, film and multimedia production has increased manifold. Today, some film productions are destined solely for worldwide distribution outside the cinema theatre circuit, leading to debates about what cinema is outside the collective viewing experience.

Indian cinema offers a specific focus on justice, the exercise of law, court judgements, and the working of legal institutions. This conference on *Indian Cinema and the Representation of Justice* invites proposals from authors and scholars to reflect on the articulations offered by the cinematographic art between an ordered system of rules for collective living and the unpredictability of collective and individual lives.

The first Indian films were based on epics or the lives of saints and deities, and justice was a recurring theme. The idea of building a new nation and the role of the state as a protector of the people became the undercurrent of the narratives in fiction films. In such a context, the question of law and order, the role of justice and the perception of injustice took on particular significance. The pervasion of corruption in the social sphere and the inaction of the government in the upholding of justice are reflected in the gangster movies for instance.

Mirrors of our societies, court cases appeal to universal, liberating and realistic emotions (guilt, blindness, lies, manipulation). Numerous productions in the seventh art in India have legal issues or court cases as their theme, which is reflected in the choice of titles of the films<sup>5</sup>.

If the courtroom is eminently present in cinema, it's because of its theatrical and spectacular character, both in terms of space and staging, and in terms of human stories and their possible outcomes. Screenwriters and film-makers routinely tackle contemporary legal issues. A variety of subjects dealing with complex issues both in criminal and civil law matters such as delinquency, rape, murder, trafficking (in organs, women, children etc.), financial scandals as well as personal matters (gender, homosexuality, marriage and divorce, adoption and child custody are dealt with in cinema. Indeed, public law issues such as education and higher education, various institutions, the severity of life in prison, independence movements challenging the state, human rights as well as private law matters covering a whole range of events «between life and death» of individuals are staged in a medium accessible to the general public.

SARI invites paper proposals in English or French, with a title, a summary (300 words) and a short presentation of the author(s) (specifying their name, research centre/university of affiliation, status and field of research).

#### **Paper proposals may explore:**

- the relationship between justice, fiction and documentary cinema in India;
- the themes of justice addressed in films (corruption, dependence/independence of justice, social demand for justice, perception of justice/injustice);
- the representation of legal institutions through the prism of tradition, colonial heritage or modernity;
- the treatment of judiciary reforms in personal laws related to marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance, maintenance, in different religious communities, or private law governing contracts between individuals, etc.
- the questions of justice in public law, especially the access to services, protection of environment, public service, etc.

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<sup>3</sup> Hindi is no longer the dominant language associated with Indian cinematographic production, even if it possesses a major influence due to the importance of the Mumbai studios, the ones most often associated with the term "Indian cinema" in a global context. It is a working language for the actors of Bollywood, but not necessarily the language of their social interactions (Ganti, 2016).

Tejaswini Ganti, "No One Thinks in Hindi Here: Language Hierarchies in Bollywood.", *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labour*, éd. Michael Curtin et Kevin Sanson, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2016, 118-131.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Grimaud, « Être ou ne pas être filmi ou la "bollywoodianisation" en chantier » in *L'Inde contemporaine. De 1950 à nos jours*, C. Jaffrelot dir., Paris, Fayard/CERI, 2006, p.717-728.

<sup>5</sup> *Adalat* (Court), *Kanoon* (The Law), *Insaaf* (Justice) in Hindi; *Neeti* or *Nyay* (Justice in different Indian languages); *Court*, *Justice* in English are words used as or in the titles of several films since more than a century of Indian cinematographic production.

- how trials are filmed to reflect on the rule of law;
- scripts written or staged with protagonists who are investigators, judges, lawyers, prosecutors, victims, defendants, detectives, gangsters, terrorists, etc. in coded settings (courts, police stations, lawyers' offices or prisons, etc.);
- cinema as a court that judges society (law is not only the object, but also the subject of cinema) or how a fictional film uses the theme of justice to criticize society or a certain political rhetoric.

### **The following questions can be addressed:**

How are the themes related to justice or injustice portrayed, and what legal issues in contemporary history are reflected on screen?

How do artists and directors position themselves when dealing with legal cases?

What genres of films deal with justice on screen?

How has cinema lent its voice to social and political aspirations, civil rights issues, social and environmental justice and education, while remaining a form of entertainment?

What place is given to marginalized communities or movements?

This list is not exhaustive, and researchers can tackle a variety of themes in order to reflect on the legal issues in India, and how this question is appropriated by filmmakers in Indian cinemas from an interdisciplinary perspective.

### **Calendar proposed for the conference**

Deadline for submission: 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025

Communication to authors: 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025

Finalization and dispatch of program: 15<sup>th</sup> April 2025

Conference dates: 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> May

Email addresses for sending proposals: [madhura.joshi@ut-capitole.fr](mailto:madhura.joshi@ut-capitole.fr) and [jitka.de.preval@free.fr](mailto:jitka.de.preval@free.fr)

***For regulatory reasons, attendees and participants are kindly invited to confirm attendance by email for either or both days by 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024.***

### **Scientific Committee**

Amandine d'Azevedo, Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3  
Corinne Bigot, Université Toulouse 2  
Geetha Ganapathy Doré, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord  
Shahzaman Haque, INALCO, Paris  
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### **Organizing Committee**

Fabien Chartier, Université Rennes 1  
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Ahmed Mulla, Université de Guyane  
Jitka de Préval, Independent Researcher, specialist of Indian cinema  
Caroline Trech, Université de Rouen