

DEVIDAS: BOLLYWOOD & "POSTCOLONIAL" SOUTH ASIA

University Studies 7 (87638)

Class: Thursday's 11-11:50AM in SSL 119

UTeacher: Gunindu Abeysekera "Guni"

E-mail: gabeysek@uci.edu

UTeach Faculty Mentors: Professor Beheroze Shroff & Professor Lucas Hilderbrand



Course Description:

Lights! Camera! Colonialism? After its grand premiere at the 2002 *Festival de Cannes* in France, *Devdas*, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, proceeded to win 51 prestigious film awards domestically *and* internationally! By specifically looking at this major Bollywood film, we will explore the discourses of gender, class, and colonialism as intersectional forces in South Asia. It is important to highlight South Asia as "postcolonial" in our title because the film both takes place in *and* adapts a novel written in British India, but more importantly, the film's social and political messages are relevant today! Consequently, it is essential to understand the influence of imperialism on South Asian societies and compare it to the agenda this film, and many South Asian films, explore. Though this amazing film will always be one of my favorites, it is important to analyze the problematic aspects of it in order to create a broader understanding of the development of South Asian culture and society.

Readings/Screenings:

- ***Devdas*** (2002) - dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali; 3h5m
Optional screening on Monday, 4/9 from 6-9PM in Doheny Beach B.
- Supplemental readings will be provided through e-mail but will **not** be required as the material will be used to give you additional context prior to our lectures

Course Requirements and Assignments:

As this is a 1-unit, P/NP course, this class will be based on, and more engaging with, your attendance, insight, and the two assignments listed below:

- **Film Poster** (Due Week 7)
- **Final Essay** (Due Week 10)
- **Attendance & Participation:** We expect every student to attend and participate in every class. Please email me in advance for any anticipated absences.

UTeach Unit Limits

UCI students may take at most *two* UTeach seminars in their entire time as an undergrad. Any others will show up on your transcript as an "unauthorized repeat."

Academic Integrity

We expect every student to follow the UCI policies on academic integrity. In particular, you should quote and cite any aspects of your work that you did not create yourself.

Accommodations

Any student who may need an accommodation due to a disability should contact the UCI Disability Services Center at (949) 824-7494 right away to explore the possible range of assistance. I encourage any student having difficulty, whether or not due to a “disability,” to talk with me individually. Don’t forget to practice self care!

Class Schedule:

Week 1: Introductions!

04/5/2018

Welcome! Today, we’ll do some quick icebreakers and go over the syllabus! We will introduce the film and learn about certain points to look out for in your viewings. Monday of week 2, *Devdas* will be screening in Doheny Beach B from 6-9PM. If you cannot attend the screening, you will be provided with a link to watch it at your convenience before our next meeting.

Week 2: *Devdas* the Novel and Colonial Context

04/12/2018

We will take a look at the original 1917 Bengali novel the film adapted and discuss the political and social climate of India at the time it was written. We will look at key narrative components and motifs that the film decided to overemphasize, add, and exclude *and* the reasons why. This brief introduction of South Asian colonial history will put *Devdas* into perspective.

Week 3: Courtesans, Class, and Classical Dance

04/19/2018

We will study the role of courtesans and dance in South Asian society and discuss their relation to themes of wealth, marriage, sexuality, and class. We will specifically look at Chandramukhi’s song and dance sequences, her dialogues with the aristocrats, and other Bollywood films with similar themes.

Week 4: Wealth and Power

04/26/2018

We will talk about wealth in terms of power in the socioeconomic class structures of British-ruled South Asia and the pursuit of wealth as a means of proving oneself and family to society.

Week 5: Religious Symbolism and Cinematic Form

05/3/2018

We will use the film and its religious allusions to problematize the idea of associating honor and nationalism with the policing of woman and femininity. We will learn about the “gaze,” particularly the “male gaze,” and analyze ways in which the film submits the female characters to it. Chandramukhi, Parvati, and the film’s matriarchs will be at the center of today’s class. The **Film Poster Project** will be assigned and explained today and will be due Week 7.

Week 6: Toxic Masculinity

05/10/2018

We will discuss “toxic masculinity” by looking at Devdas, his father, Chuni Babu, Kali Babu, and Paro’s husband in order to understand the discourse of sexism better and how it affects *all* genders.

Week 7: Devdas Adaptations; *Film Poster Due!*

05/17/2018

We will take a break by discussing your favorite songs and scenes from the film. Today will be screening-heavy because we will watch clips from older adaptations of the novel and compare/contrast it to Bhansali’s version to exemplify the grand nature of period films and the purpose they serve in creating narratives of nationalism today.

Week 8: Intersectionalities and Classism

05/24/2018

We will use our accumulated knowledge to unpack classism in the film and relate it as intersectional to the earlier topics of the course including characters’ professions, the film’s sexism, and colonial occupation of South Asia. The 2-3 page **Final Essay** will be assigned this week and due week 10.

Week 9: Anti-Blackness

05/31/2018

Following our discussion on colonialism and white supremacy, we will continue the discourses of the international and bring up anti-Blackness in South Asian cinema and society.

Week 10: Final Thoughts; *Final Essay Due!*

06/7/2018

For our last day, since the final essay will already be due at the beginning of class, we will open up a brief discussion on your essays and final thoughts about *Devdas* and our knowledge on the topics we tackled this quarter!

Devdas (2002) Summary

Born into an aristocratic family, Devdas Mukherjee (Shah Rukh Khan) grew up with a silver spoon in his mouth. He spent his childhood in the lush village of Tal Sonapur, where he spent most of his childhood, indulged by his lovely playmate Parvati "Paro" (Aishwarya Rai). They grew up sharing a special relationship in which they existed only to each other, oblivious to all their differences of status and background. Slowly, their relationship changed into love but it was still unspoken as their dreams were broken when his family sent Devdas to London for his education. Paro's world crashed knowing that Devdas would be gone, so she lit a candle for him and kept it alive until his return. 10 years later, where the film starts, Devdas comes home and is beset by Paro's beauty and longs to win his family over for her. Paro's mother, Sumitra proposes their marriage to Devdas' parents. With their positions of privilege, Devdas' parents, Narayan and Kaushalya Mukherjee, meet Sumitra's proposal with condescending arrogance. This causes a rift between their once close families, and even though Devdas tries to convince his father, only antagonism comes his way. Eventually, Devdas moves away from his family and Paro and writes her a letter, asking her to forget him, not realizing he'd be the one to never be able to forget her. When he tries to return to Paro, it is too late as Paro's marriage has been arranged to a wealthier, older aristocrat, Zamindar Bhuvan, for her mother's vanity. She calls out Devdas for not standing by her and they part ways with a heart-broken Paro entering a chaste marriage and a shattered Devdas walking towards anguish and Chunni Babu (Jackie Shroff), his friend that leads him to alcoholism and Chandramukhi (Madhuri Dixit). Chandramukhi, a stunning, famous courtesan falls in love for the first time and it happens to be with Devdas. Devdas and Chandramukhi form a unique bond with each other, as he shares his intense pain of his unfulfilled love for Paro while Chandramukhi shares hers for Devdas. Kali Babu is a regular attendee at Chandramukhi's brothel, but he also happens to be Paro's new son-in-law. His jealousy of Devdas complicates the story, as he reveals Paro's love for Devdas to her husband and makes the possibility of Devdas and Paro ever meeting again more difficult.