

Indian Films as a Lens on Indian Society

1-Day Workshop

Films, the primary cultural product of India today, offer insight into topics including religion, love, gender, family life, history, politics, national identity, and the arts. This one-day program for secondary school educators addressed how teachers can use films to deepen students' knowledge of India and to raise questions for further exploration of Indian history, politics, and culture.



The primary scholar for the day was Harleen Singh, the Helaine and Alvin Allen Assistant Professor of Literature at Brandeis University. She presented an overview of the history and diversity of Indian films and how they have been affected by changes in politics, economics, and technology. Next, Professor Singh and Tom Lamont, a teacher at Groton School, led a discussion of two films (*Ballad of Mangal Pandey* and *Monsoon Wedding*) that the 25 program participants had watched in preparation for the workshop.

After lunch, the teachers divided into two discussion groups. Professor Singh helped her group explore art films as literary texts, while Mr. Lamont's group examined art films as historical texts. Teachers in both groups discussed specific films and their potential as teaching materials. In the final session of the day, Professor Singh and Mr. Lamont screened clips from contemporary Indian films and shared ideas for using them not only as a way to motivate student interest, but also as a way to promote inquiry into important issues affecting India today.

Participants in the workshop reported that, "both speakers really knew their material and were able to show how we can integrate [Indian films] into our classes" and, "All was first rate; I will purchase many of the films and books discussed today."