

Beyond the Fourth Wall: Connecting with City (Non-fiction film)



Usha Rao

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ABOUT

Usha Rao is a cultural anthropologist and independent media/filmmaker. Her research interest is cities – specifically Bangalore’s on-going transformation post with the arrival of large projects like the metro. Usha works with non-fiction film. She uses the medium as an educator to evoke discussion about the diverse life worlds of cities, the processes that produce the urban and their impact on ecology, inhabitation and equity. As an educator she emphasises sensing rather than ‘comprehending’ the city. Usha has worked with students of development and architecture/urban design to shift the focus away from the city as a site of ‘professional practice’ to a universe that needs to be felt, sensed and reflected upon. She attempts to facilitate a grounded understanding of the urban and therefore an empathetic connect with the city as a space that is lived and inhabited by multiple kinds of ‘subjects.’

OVERVIEW

The course explores urban life through non-fiction (documentary) films, primarily from India, along with extracts from novels, plays, and poetry. Learners will engage with diverse realities and the lives of various subjects, fostering an empathetic understanding of everyday experiences in Indian cities and their social, ecological, and political challenges. The approach integrates disciplines such as media, anthropology, and urban studies/design, encouraging participants to view material beyond their primary fields. Participants are invited to use visual media, creative texts, sound, or other methods to make assignments personal, creative, playful, and original.

METHODOLOGY

Cities, as microcosms of society, provide a rich context for films exploring themes like development, work, and gender. Migration raises questions about the boundaries between hinterlands and metropolises, while infrastructure films spark discussions on gender and public space. Each session features film viewings followed by interactive discussions, with home viewing or excerpts assigned by the facilitator. Readings, including optional fiction and articles, complement the films. The course encourages immersive engagement, personal connections, subjective interpretations, and discussions on social, economic, and ecological issues, enhancing academic exploration.

KEYWORDS

immersive, empathy, social, connections, interspecies.

LOCATION

Bangalore

MAXIMUM PARTICIPANTS

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