

## FILM REVIEWS

# Hello Photo

PRODUCED BY  
NINA DAVENPORT  
IN CONJUNCTION WITH  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY'S FILM  
STUDY CENTER

DISTRIBUTED BY FIRST RUN  
ICARUS FILMS  
153 WAVERLY PLACE  
NEW YORK, NY 10014  
212-727-1711

1994. VHS VIDEO. 55 MINUTES



Photo courtesy of First Run Icarus Films

**H**ello Photo contains results of Nina Davenport's one year of travel through India with a 16mm camera. Several times we actually see her using her camera in mirror-image. The tone and perspective are framed by Davenport's use of a Lord Krishna quote at the very beginning of her film: "Open your eyes and see my thousands of forms, diverse, divine, of many colors and shapes. Of course with the ordinary eye, you cannot see me." The mood is one of walking around and seeing what there is to be seen. All that I have to say in the following review comes from this premise.

The film is, for the most part, an exercise in seeing the filmic results of physical interactions of people, places and things with a person (female) using a motion picture camera. We see the results of looking-with-a-camera and, in places, being-looked-at-with-a-camera in both acknowledged and unacknowledged interactions, some welcome, others not so.

For example, in some scenes, people, usually children, are competing to get their faces in front of the camera; in others we see people standing back, taking more of a passive and tolerant pose and attitude. We are regularly reminded, in a reflexive stance,

that we are always getting what a person-with-a-camera has seen—sounds of both operating film and still cameras are heard at regular intervals. And as part of a voice-over commentary, we learn about the paradox of wanting to be seen accompanied by the dislike of being looked at.

The film is largely about questions of mediated representation starting with references to Bombay's prolific film industry—these scenes seem to book-end and punctuate the total film. Davenport offers viewers a rich array—but little understanding—of images, of a broad variety of locations, people, activities and topics, some for public access, others more in private contexts.

In addition to images of film production, Davenport includes scenes of oxen blocking traffic, a polo match, workers in a jute factory, a traveling circus, preparations for a wedding, erotic sculpture (we hear: "Please help yourself to take a photograph"), men and women in chains, elephants blessing people, beggars as well as a school for the blind including men and boys reading Braille texts (an ironic twist on the predominant ocularcentric perspective) among several others. These juxtapositions are indeed intriguing and appealing for certain kinds of questions, especially complex and cross-culturally

variable relationships of humans, animals and machines.

Viewers will be reminded of *Man with a Movie Camera* by Dziga Vertov and other of his montage films, or more specific to India, *Photo Wallas* by David and Judith MacDougall (1992). Though the latter has a much more direct attention to itinerant still photographers, it retains in places a similar enigmatic quality.

The value of the film is that it makes viewers conscious of camera-people interactions, calling into question what one really has when one has pictorial representation of virtually any kind. This is a film about relationships that everyone knows exist but, for various reasons, do not want to attend to in any sustained manner. It also can be valued as a film about the politics of camera-use—who has the right to look, to film, or to avoid the camera gaze. Several times we hear off-camera voices: "Tell me what are you doing?," "Are you looking for anything?," and, for the title, "Hello, hello."

For college-level film studies and aesthetic objectives, the film might stand on its own—it is a particularly rich text for communication and media studies. But for social science instruction, the film must be accompanied by some form of ethnographic infor-

mation on Indian society and culture—in short, more contextual information is needed. Specific learning contexts and specific interests of an instructor will determine the value of this work. ■

Richard Chalfen

**RICHARD CHALFEN** is Professor of Anthropology at Temple University and a member of the Asian Studies Faculty. His courses cover visibility and visual cultures (in the U.S. and Japan) and relations of cultural anthropology to home media and mass media. Research interests include indigenous imagery (Navajo, urban U.S. teenagers, Japanese Americans), and are currently focused on Japanese Home Media. Major publications include *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987), *Turning Leaves* (1991), and *Through Navajo Eyes* (with J. Adair and S. Worth, 1997).

## Puja

### *Hindu Expressions of Devotion*

PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED BY  
THE ARTHUR M. SACKLER  
GALLERY  
OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
202-357-4880

1996. VHS VIDEO. 20 MINUTES

**T**his video is part of a larger packet the Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution has produced in conjunction with the exhibit of the same title. The packet also includes a teacher's guide with reproducible handouts and Indian pop-art posters of various Hindu deities. The materials in the teacher's packet are also available on a Web site, <http://www.si.edu/asia/puja/start.htm>.

The video has three parts in which three types of *puja*, or Hindu devotional practice, are illustrated and described. These are: a general description of *puja*; worship in the home; and worship at a temple. This gives some idea of the diversity of *puja* practices. The video depicts the significance of various items which are used in different types of *puja* and well illustrates the significance of *puja* to the worshipper. It explains that images and various items used in *puja* are representative of meanings and connections not immediately apparent to the uninitiated observer, such as that images of gods are considered to be representative, not actual deities themselves, or that various substances in which images are bathed represent geographic or essential forms.

The final section of the video features two subsections on household Durga *puja* in Western India and a Chandi *puja* at an outdoor shrine in Orissa state in Eastern India. This section is completely unnarrated, and there is no description of the

ceremonies in the teacher's packet, so these sections may be difficult to explain for instructors who are unfamiliar with Hindu ritual. It might, however, be interesting for students to try to analyze the activities shown. This section does come after the first section is repeated with captions, which means that it necessitates fast-forwarding if the instructor is not using the captioned version.

Footage of *pujas* from India and the U.S. (the Washington, D.C. metro area) is included, but interviews are conducted only with Indians living in the U.S. Their analysis tends to focus on rational explanations for *puja* activities. While they are accurate descriptions of one set of beliefs about *puja*, they are still descriptive of only one set of beliefs. As in many other aspects of Hinduism and life in India, there are many possible interpretations of meanings, and the selection of one necessarily excludes many others. For instance, the belief stated above that images are not the deity is contradicted in much

*bhakti* literature. This is but one example.

This packet should be of use to educators of almost any level, as it is a basic introduction to a topic about which most Americans know virtually nothing. The level of presentation is basic enough that, when combined with other materials provided in the packet, students as low as third grade level would be able to make use of it, but it also has enough substance that college undergraduates (and even some graduate students) could make use of it as a basic introduction to some Hindu religious practices. ■

Keith Snodgrass

**KEITH SNODGRASS** is Outreach Coordinator and Assistant Director of the South Asia Center at the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. His work has focused on religion and politics in North India and Pakistan, as well as on K-12 education about South Asia in the U.S. He has taught courses on Media and Society in South Asia and reviews materials for several education journals.

### Editor's Note:

The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign contributed the two previous reviews. AEMS provides information about where to find audio-visual media resources for teaching and learning about Asia and advice about which ones may best suit your needs. The program offers a Web site <http://www.aems.uiuc.edu> with a searchable database and full-text reviews as well as a call in/write-in service and twice-yearly newsletter, both free of charge. AEMS is supported by funding from The Freeman Foundation and The Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership. Contact: Tel: (888) 828-2367 or 265-0640. Fax: (217) 265-0641. E-mail: [aems@uiuc.edu](mailto:aems@uiuc.edu).

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