

music in the film plays on this drama and at times is out of step with the pace of the film, nearly creating a distance filled with dramatic cliché. Despite these moments, Zhang Yimou successfully creates an epic journey filled with glimpses of what it might have been like for the average family.

Many educators have used this film successfully in its entirety and in clips. History Professor and former high school teacher Kelly Long has created a useful lesson plan for high school students available for free on the Asian Educational Media Services (AEMS) Web site at <http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/HTML/TeachersGuides.htm>. Short clips from the film offer enrichment for lessons on a particular historical event. For example, a scene that skillfully depicts the Great Leap Forward has Fugui and family with town cadre and others collecting steel for backyard furnaces. The revolutionary rhetoric of the time and the idea of “leaping” ahead of the industrial world are carefully portrayed. Fast-forward to the end of the scene to a small gathering of townsfolk: they’re preparing to send their steel quota off, enough to make three cannonballs for the revolution. The scene is a fine example of a visual that well complements a lesson on the Great Leap Forward.

Teachers might also consider including the context of the film’s release in 1994 when it was banned in China for public screening and Zhang Yimou was criticized for this work. There is some debate about the reasons behind this move by Chinese officials. Perhaps the film’s less-than-positive commentary on the “Party’s Promise” or the way certain political events are portrayed encouraged China’s Film Bureau censors to take action. Many film critics argue that the real reason Zhang Yimou’s *To Live* was “banned” in China was because he sent it to the 1994 Cannes Film Festival before the Film Bureau had a chance to review it and sanction its release to the international market. Exploration of these events could provide a nice stepping-stone for a deeper discussion of banned art and censorship in China, a complex and multi-layered issue.

Finally, *To Live* offers an opportunity to explore the role of marketing and the use of “otherness” in the contemporary international art market. After the international success of Zhang Yimou and other directors in the late 1980s, the so-called Chinese “Fifth Generation,” a debate ensued both in and outside of China about who these movies were being made for and marketed to. Were Zhang Yimou and other artists pandering to an international and Western market by creating an “exoticized” view of China? Or was international marketing playing this card for better distribution? Again, these questions provide fertile ground for further discussion on how images of China are packaged and distributed around the world. In the end, whatever side of the debate you sit on, Zhang Yimou is clear in interviews that he is a Chinese filmmaker making films in China. As he has said, “I’m one hundred percent Chinese and so are my films.” ■

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Who is Indian? A Review of *My Mother India*

Written and directed by Safina Uberoi

Produced by Penelope McDonald

VHS. Color. 52 minutes. Chili Films, 2001



My *Mother India* weaves together the experiences of one family over three generations, the past with the present, 1947 with 1984, Australia and India. Written and directed by Safina Uberoi, this documentary begins as a hilarious account of a marriage between an Australian woman named Patricia, and Jit, an Indian-Sikh man—Uberoi’s parents. They fell in love and married in Canberra but decided to settle in India. Uberoi paints a colorful picture of her childhood and her multi-cultural upbringing in New Delhi by discussing her parents’ notorious *kitsch* calendar collection and how her mother Patricia, because of her foreign upbringing, causes scandals

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Drowned Out: We Can't Wish Them Away
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FILM REVIEWS

in the neighborhood when she hangs her underwear out to dry. Uberoi's family proves even more atypical when we learn that her grandparents eloped and, after several years of marriage, were divorced in 1950. Her grandfather, Papa-ji, was a guru, while her opinionated grandmother, Bijee, with whom one cannot help but fall in love, is a feminist who openly declares, "all men are bastards."

The film is narrated by Uberoi and consists of a compilation of interviews with different members of her family about their lives and experiences in India. The documentary takes on a more somber tone when Uberoi turns to the events of 1984. Her family's peaceful existence is destroyed when Hindu-Sikh tensions begin to escalate. Papa-ji, diagnosed with Alzheimer's, begins to revisit his past. His daughter-in-law Patricia, Papa-ji's caretaker during his final days, discusses how Papa-ji begins to lovingly reminisce about the early years of his marriage to Bijee. Even though Papa-ji is on his deathbed, Bijee refuses to visit or forgive him for the emotional agony he caused her while they were married, including the time when he almost deserted her after she had miscarried a baby just after they escaped to India from Lahore in 1947. Talk of the curfews and communal riots surrounding Hindu-Sikh tensions in 1984 also rekindles Papa-ji's memories of the curfews enforced in Lahore before partition and before the deadly violence of 1947 began. Ironically, by his revisiting and reenacting the past, the past comes alive in the present. Uberoi adds, "As he went mad, it seemed as if the whole state of Punjab was mirroring his insanity."

Uberoi discusses the political instability in India in 1984, when tensions between Sikh extremists and Prime Minister Indira Gand-

hi's government began to mount in the Punjab. Sikh extremists were demanding the creation of a separate Sikh state of Khalistan. With no peaceful solution in sight, in June 1984 the Indian government implemented Operation Blue Star—a military operation intended to restrain and remove Sikh extremists who had taken up refuge in the Golden Temple in Amritsar. In the battle that ensued, hundreds of Sikhs and Indian military personnel were injured or killed. Sadly, Papa-ji's funeral took place in the context of these turbulent days. For the following several months, the aftershocks of Amritsar vibrated throughout India with deadly resonance. When Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards assassinated her on October 31, the Uberoi family was at their family home in New Delhi. Vengeful and bloodthirsty mobs demanding Sikh lives roamed the streets of the city, and the Uberois were forced to flee from their home.

The events of 1984 literally tear the family apart as some members gradually begin to move to Australia. Everyone in the family is forced to reassess who they are and how they are perceived in India. Patricia discusses how Jit's ideal of India is destroyed when he realizes that he is not considered an Indian, but a Sikh. After decades of living in India, Patricia too feels alienated and is forced to decide where her home is. Uberoi and her siblings fight their own battles with identity; Uberoi reclaims her Sikh heritage, her brother Prem is compelled to move to Australia, and her sister, on moving to Australia, changes her name from the Indian name of Simeran to the Greek name of Zoe.

Produced by Chili Films, this acclaimed film is a winner of numerous awards including the Jury Prize for Best Australian Documentary, Australian Film Critics Circle; Best Australian Documentary, Real Life on Film Documentary Festival; and Best Long-Form Documentary Australian Teachers of Media Award. It is highly recommended for high school and college students engaged with Indian history, issues of religion, identity, transnational cultural politics, and cultural diversity. This powerful film moves beyond just being a commentary on the events of 1947 and 1984. A personal story that almost anyone can relate to at some level, it is about happiness, love, marriage, betrayal, hardship, sorrow, spirituality, loss, and bitter hatred. Given the ethnic and religious tensions pervasive in India, the strength of this film ultimately lies in its ability to move beyond the traditional Hindu-Muslim dichotomy popular in literature and films on India, and raise an even more profound and complex question of what it means to be an Indian. ■

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