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barbican

Rewriting the Rules: Pioneering Indian Cinema after 1970
Thu 3 Oct – Thu 12 Dec 2024

Barbican Cinema

<https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2024/series/rewriting-the-rules-pioneering-indian-cinema-after-1970>

The impact of Indian Parallel Cinema, one of South Asia's first post-colonial film movements, is writ large across **Rewriting the Rules: Pioneering Indian Cinema after 1970**, a three-month long cinema season featuring the innovative work of a new wave of filmmakers in the **1970s, 80s and 90s**, whose films were socially minded and politically committed. This important season, including in-depth introductions, is an integral part of the Barbican's major exhibition **The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998** (5 October 2024 – 5 January 2025) which explores a period of significant cultural and political change in India's recent history.

The documentary, narrative and experimental works (including many rarities) showcased in *Rewriting the Rules* are made by filmmakers who were not afraid to make bold aesthetic choices, often opting for a creative hybridity and experimentation that fused together aspects of Indian art and culture. Their works also gave agency to themes, narratives and groups who had often been rendered invisible or marginalised on screen, including women, Muslims, the lower castes, and LGBTQ people.



The Circus Tent, dir Govindan Aravindan

Opening on 3 October with **Interview** (1971), **Mrinal Sen's** seminal film of the Parallel Cinema movement, the season includes **Awatar Krishna Kaul's** noirish and naturalistic **27 Down** (1974); a stunning restoration of **Govindan Aravindan's** classic masterpiece **The Circus Tent** (1978); **Duvidha** (1973) by **Mani Kaul**, a key figure in Parallel Cinema; and

India's first queer film, **Prem Kapoor's** pioneering ***Alley of Ill Repute (Badnam Basti)*** (1971), which was believed lost and only recently rediscovered in 2019.

The influence of Parallel Cinema can be seen in ***Report to Mother*** (1986) the final, experimental film from Avant Garde filmmaker **John Abraham**, as well as in mainstream cinema which imagined the social unrest of the era through the cult of the Angry Young Man, including **Yash Chopra's** major box-office hit ***The Wall*** (1975).

Women's rights and perspectives are the focus of a double-bill featuring ***India Cabaret*** (1985) directed by **Mira Nair** (*Monsoon Wedding*) and ***Maid Servant*** (1981) made by the **Yuganthar feminist film collective** which examines the economic struggles, gender dynamics and class disparities facing a rural migrant who becomes a domestic worker for a rich family.

From **Anand Patwardhan** – still one of India's most important socio-political filmmakers whose body of work spans five decades - is ***In the Name of God*** (1992) which looks at the religious fundamentalism that grips India to this day.

[Over the weekend of Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 October](#), to mark the eve of the Hindu Festival of Lights, Diwali, and the Sikh celebration Bandi Chhor Divas, visitors can enjoy events from across the Barbican's varied, interdisciplinary programme with a spotlight on Indian arts and culture, with free entry to ***The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998*** in the art gallery. In the Cinemas curator Shai Heredia will introduce (in a pre-recorded video message) a special programme of experimental shorts ***This Bit of India***, exploring youth culture, feminist solidarities and urbanization. And across the centre, the much celebrated and long-running **Darbar Festival** of Indian Classical Music (24 – 27 October) returns including a **pop-up market**, with stalls and a programme of free concerts that will transform the Barbican into an an immersive celebration of Indian culture.

Gali Gold, Barbican Head of Cinema, says: *“Presenting this punchy and enlightening film programme as part of Barbican's landmark exhibition **The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998** gives us an opportunity to profoundly engage in the work of filmmakers and artists who offer a stunning creative vision of India during a significant period of political and cultural change. Doing so at a time when India is going through a new period of socio-political upheaval, gives this programme further resonance, turning these cinematic rarities to essential viewing”.*

Dr Omar Ahmed, season curator says: *“The critical, polarizing period considered in the Gallery exhibition coincides with the emergence of Indian Parallel Cinema, South Asia's first post-colonial art film movement, which spanned four decades beginning in the late 1960s. I am excited to have curated a selection of Indian films that exemplify the creative innovation of these decades. These films showcase new filmmaking techniques, aesthetics, and on-screen representations that redefined Indian cinema. All of the films in the programme complement and enrich the exhibition, pointing to a broader modern visual lexicon that was potentially at work, and which challenged the status quo in India and beyond. Many of these films have rarely been screened in the UK, making this programme significant in introducing audiences to the rich and diverse landscape of Indian cinema during this period of great change”.*

Dr Omar Ahmed is a UK based film scholar with a PhD from the University of Manchester. He is also a writer and international curator of South Asian Cinema and has published widely on Indian Cinema. Omar co-curates the annual 'Not Just Bollywood' season for HOME, Manchester which he founded in 2017. Recent film curation projects have included a strand on Parallel Cinema for Il Cinema Ritrovato (Bologna, 2021) and a forthcoming retrospective on Indian film star Smita Patil for the Leeds International Film Festival in November 2024.

His new book *The Revolution of Indian Parallel Cinema in the Global South (1968–1995): From Feminism to Iconoclasm* will be published by [Bloomsbury in early 2025](#).

PROGRAMME

Interview ^{PG*} + introduction by season curator Dr Omar Ahmed.

India 1971, Dir Mrinal Sen, 101 min, in Bengali with English subtitles

Thu 3 Oct, 6.45pm

Cinema 1

A young man needs a Western-style suit for a job interview; when the big day arrives, a strike at the dry cleaners throws everything into chaos. This formally and politically radical film, drawing on local and international influences, is exemplary of the new Parallel Cinema - a manifesto calling for a break with the existing Indian commercial and art cinema, co-authored by director Mrinal Sen in 1968.

With thanks to NFDC - National Film Archive of India

The Wall (Deewaar)^{12A}

India 1975, Dir Yash Chopra, 174 min, in Hindi with English subtitles

Sun 6 Oct, 3pm

Cinema 3

A major box office hit in 1975, this is also one of the most significant and influential mainstream socio-political films of its time. An emblematic 'Angry Young Man', Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan) symbolizes the collective angst of a generation frustrated with socio-economic inequities such as unemployment, social injustice and political oppression. Although released before the Emergency (1975-1977), the film resonated with the disillusionment in government and authority figures that were prevalent during this period.

27 Down ^{U*}

India 1974, Dir Awatar Krishna Kaul, 108 min, in Hindi with English subtitles

Wed 23 Oct, 6.30pm

Cinema 3

A train conductor's monotonous existence is irrevocably altered when he meets a young woman on a journey from Bombay to Varanasi. Shot in noirish monochrome, with a semi-documentary feel amplified by naturalistic on-location shooting, this is a key work in the foundational years of Parallel Cinema.

This Bit of India 15* + Introduction by curator Shai Heredia

Sat 26 Oct, 4pm

Cinema 3

A programme of experimental films that map the post-colonial experience through the artist's lens. Exploring youth culture, feminist solidarities and urbanisation, the line-up includes the unconventional city film *Memories of Milk City* (Ruchir Joshi, 1991), and a documentary profile of a woman activist, *Sudesh* (Yugantar Film Collective, 1983), made by an Indian feminist film collective. Programme curated and introduced by curator Shai Heredia.

This Bit of That India

India 1972, Dir SNS Sastry, 20 min, English

This Bit Of That India is a layered reflection on youth culture, diversity, progress, education, technology and sexuality. The film juxtaposes documentary moments that celebrate

individual freedom with a theatrical performance of Federico Garcia Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, as a metaphor for repression and conformity.

Memory: Record/Erase

India 1996, Dir Nalini Malani, 10 min

Memory: Record/Erase is pioneering video artist, Nalini Malani's first use of stop-motion animation, a technique that now characterises her practice. Thematically, the animation explores the construction and layering of memory suggested in the film's title, while addressing the social status and roles of women.

Memories of Milk City

India 1991, Dir Ruchir Joshi, 13 min, English, Bengali & Hindi with English subtitles

A fourteen-minute cine-poem, *Memories of Milk City* catches Ahmedabad at a time of transition, peeling away layers of textures, gestures and sounds, tripping over a culture and a language at war with themselves.

Sudesh

India 1983, Dir Yugantar Film Collective, 34 min, Hindi and Garhwali with English subtitles

Sudesh tells the story of a woman who is a village activist in the Chipko Forest Conservation Movement in the foothills of the Himalayas. In this area, people depend entirely on the forest for their daily needs of firewood, food, and water. But the forests have been destroyed by powerful timber traders—and along with the forest, the livelihood of the people has been threatened.

The Circus Tent ^{PG}

India 1978, Dir Govindan Aravindan, 129 min, in Malayalam with English subtitles

Sat 2 Nov, 3.45pm
Cinema 3

Hailed by many as Kerala filmmaker Govindan Aravindan's masterpiece, *The Circus Tent* is a visually stunning and poetic exploration of the inner lives of a travelling circus trope in which old age, loneliness and regret becomes magnified through Aravindan's salient observational perspective.

The restoration of *The Circus Tent* in 2021 by the Film Heritage Foundation, India, brings to life the extraordinary pictorial sensibilities of a film that has been reclaimed, and is now being rediscovered by a new generation of filmgoers.

Duvidha ^{PG*}

India 1973, Dir Mani Kaul, 82 min, in Hindi with English subtitles

Thu 7 Nov, 6.45pm
Cinema 3

Left alone shortly after her wedding, a bride's life takes an unexpected turn when a ghost falls in love with her and assumes her husband's identity. Anchored in an evocative feminist perspective, this is a virtuoso blend of folklore and avant-garde cinema, deeply rooted in Rajasthani culture.

India Cabaret + Maid Servant ^{PG*} + Introduction

India 1985, Dir Mira Nair, 59 min, in Hindi with English subtitles

India 1981, Dirs Deepa Dhanraj, Abha Bhaiya, Navroze Contractor, Meera Rao, 25 min, in Hindi with English subtitles

Wed 11 Nov, 6.30pm
Cinema 3

A double bill of documentaries focusing on women's rights and perspectives. **India Cabaret**, directed by Mira Nair (*Monsoon Wedding*), is set in the hidden world of Mumbai's cabaret dancers, and **Maid Servant** made by the Yuganthar feminist film collective who worked closely with existing women's groups of the time, examines the economic struggles, gender dynamics and class disparities facing a rural migrant who becomes a domestic worker for a rich family.

Report to Mother ^{15*} + Introduction

India 1986, Dir John Abraham, 115 min, in Malayalam with English subtitles

Sun 1 Dec, 3.45pm

Cinema 3

Embedded in the socio-political contexts of Kerala in the 1980s, this road movie-come-political chronicle explores themes of grief, solidarity, and the cost of political revolution. The story unfolds as a young man embarks on a journey to inform the mother of his deceased friend about her son's tragic death.

With thanks to NFDC - National Film Archive of India

In the Name of God ^{PG*}

India 1992, Dir Anand Patwardhan, 76 min, in Hindi with English subtitles and English

Wed 4 Dec, 7pm

Cinema 3

This provocative documentary by Anand Patwardhan explores the intense and turbulent socio-political landscape of India in the early 1990s. Focusing on the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi controversy – in which Hindus claimed the right to demolish an existing mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh and build a temple on the same site – it probes the rise of Hindu nationalism and its devastating impact on communal harmony.

Alley of Ill Repute (Badnam Basti) ^{PG*} + Introduction

India 1971, Dir Prem Kapoor, 83 min, in Hindi with English subtitles

Thu 12 Dec, 6.45pm

Cinema 3

The rewriting of the traditional rules that had underpinned Indian cinema for a number of decades was characterized by its taboo breaking, particularly around gender and sexuality. *Alley of Ill Repute (Badnam Basti)* -- a notable example of this -- revolves around a complex love triangle between two men and a woman. Originally believed lost and only recently rediscovered in 2019, this pioneering film was India's first queer film.

Tickets on sale to Barbican Members on 14 August

Tickets on sale to general public including Young Barbican on 15 August

Box office: www.barbican.org.uk

Standard: £13

Members: £10.40

Concessions: £11

Under 18s: £6

Young Barbican: £5

There are multiple ticket deals and offers for this season. Please check our website for more information.

- Buy one Rewriting the Rules cinema ticket to get 50% off one [The Imaginary Institution of India](#) exhibition ticket.
- Buy one [The Imaginary Institution of India](#) exhibition ticket to get 50% off two Rewriting the Rules cinema tickets.
- 20% discount when you buy more than one Rewriting the Rules cinema ticket.

There is £1.50 booking fee for purchases made online

Certificate to be confirmed

* This film has been locally classified by the City of London Corporation

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Download images for *Rewriting the Rules: Pioneering Indian Cinema from 1970* from [here](#)

[The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998](#)

The world's first exhibition to explore and chart a period of significant cultural and political change in India through the work of 30 artists. Featuring nearly 150 works of art across painting, sculpture, photography, installation and film, this landmark group show examines the ways in which Indian artists have distilled significant episodes of the late 20th century and reflected intimate moments of life during this time. A specially curated film season, *Rewriting the Rules: Pioneering Indian Cinema after 1970*, will run alongside the exhibition.

Barbican Art Gallery

5 October 2024 – 5 January 2025

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Barbican press room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communications team's contact details are listed on our website at www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room

About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), and a London base of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other associates and partners including the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [the BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Britten Sinfonia](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), [Darbar Festival](#), [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [Drum Works](#), [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), [Serious](#), and [Trafalgar Entertainment](#).

For more information, visit our [website](#) or connect with us on [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Spotify](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

About Barbican Cinema

We connect audiences with a curated programme of international cinema; from celebrated filmmakers to ground-breaking and under-heard voices from past and present.

Our programmes are presented in Cinemas 1 in the main centre and Cinemas 2&3 on Beech Street. Our programme ranges from thematic seasons that respond to today's world, to new releases, ScreenTalks, cross-artform collaborations, family events, access screenings and event cinema that presents the performing arts on screen.

We showcase the work of emerging filmmakers, as well as less familiar work of exceptional filmmakers from the UK and around the world.

We champion the work of Barbican Young Programmers and give stage to emerging musicians in our ongoing film & live music series which includes our flagship collaboration with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

As part of a cross-arts centre, our cinemas are a cultural space for people to share the viewing experience. We strive to be inclusive in everything we do; providing platforms for the widest possible range of filmmakers and ensuring we are an open, welcoming and accessible venue for all our audiences.