

AMSS 37th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Crossing Boundaries: Mobilizing Faith, Diversity and Dialogue”

Hosted By:
The Harvard Divinity School
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
October 24 – 25, 2008

ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

“Gender and Conflict in Indian Documentary Filmmaking”

By: Alka Kurian
(Ph.D candidate, University of Sunderland, UK)

This paper explores a specific genre of documentary cinema in India that has reached a critical phase in its political development and which aims at offering a counter narrative to the neo-liberal narrative construction of the Indian state. This presentation eschews the rationale of the country's new middle cinema, despite incorporating realism as an aesthetic (and not ideological) strategy in hopes of *wooing* back spectators, and responding to market demand, as it is unable to break away from the conventions of the *cinema of pleasure*. At a time when state-sponsored mass media has chosen to remain silent on sensitive political issues, while fighting a constant battle against censorship regime, documentary cinema should be celebrated for going beyond polite consensus. This presentation illustrates this argument through an examination of Rakesh Sharma's "Final Solution," Sanjay Kak's Jashn-e-Azadi, and Kavita Pai's "There was a Queen." Sharma's film investigates the 2002 Gujarat attacks in which 2,500 Muslims were slaughtered, several hundred women and girls raped and almost a quarter million families uprooted. The films by Pai and Kak expose the human face of the religious and political conflict that has claimed the lives of 70,000 people during the 18-year conflict in Kashmir, one of the most heavily militarized and critical conflict zones in the world. This paper will attempt a gendered analysis of these films within the broader framework of the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, and the globalization and crisis of masculinity.