Call for papers – Studies in South Asian Film & Media (SAFM) Special Issue: Hindutva politics and South Asian cinema–media in the age of Modi

Since the start of Narendra Modi’s term as India’s prime minister, one witnesses a resurgence of the Hindu far right and Hindutva politics in India, as well as corresponding movements in Hindi cinema and media. From PK (2014) to the much anticipated, and delayed, Padma(a)vat(i) (2018), Bollywood and other forms of contemporary South Asian media have responded to the proliferation of right-wing Hindu ideologies in myriad, oftentimes contentious and frequently innovative ways. While the impact of such right-wing parties on Bollywood can be traced back to the release of Mani Ratnam’s Bombay (1995), this special issue seeks to examine the contemporary manifestations – and fraught interrelationships – of Hindutva politics and Hindi cinema and media during the time of Modi (2014 – present). We are particularly interested in examining the range of approaches taken towards Hindutva politics, whether it be the use of comedy or farce, as in PK, the melodramatic sentimentality of Bajrangi Bhaijaan (2015), or the latest historical epics of Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Related to this theme is the subsequent rise of attacks, in person and via social media, upon directors and actors associated with such films, most notably, Bhansali and Deepika Padukone.

Hindutva cultural politics, however, are not limited to the theater screen or to contests over star personalities alone. Rather, we can see their manifestation in the blurring of boundaries between self and screen, self-representation and self-broadcast over social media. The most egregious elements of this are the ways in which perpetrators and bystanders record acts of violence in full daylight and broadcast them over social media. Its other, more everyday forms are Hindutva trolls and leaders holding forth on WhatsApp and other platforms, challenging the notion of news itself.

This special issue of Studies in South Asian Film & Media (SAFM) seeks papers addressing the representations of and reactions to Hindutva politics and ideologies in Hindi cinema and media during Modi’s tenure. Along with papers looking at the contemporary controversies surrounding Padma(a)vat(i), we welcome articles on the following topics:

- Genres, including comedy, horror, and the historical, that are being redefined to address Hindutva politics in India
- Contemporary representations of Indo-Pakistan relations
- The ‘fascist’ aesthetic of recent films, including Bajirao Mastani and Padma(a)vat(i), with regard to their cinematic excesses and glorifications of previous Hindu empires
- Hindutva politics in mainstream Indian television
- Hindutva trolls on social media
- Hindutva movements, boycotts and attacks against Hindi films, filmmakers and stars, including, e.g., Shah Rukh Khan, Deepika Padukone and Sanjay Leela Bhansali

Along with full-length essays exploring such topics, we are also interested in shorter, less formal pieces, including:
• Documentations of counter-movements working against the rise of Hindutva policies

• Interviews with Hindi filmmakers, television personalities and stars affected by Hindutva politics in recent years

• Working notes by social media activists mobilizing against the contemporary rise of the Hindu far right in everyday life

If you are interested in submitting to this special issue of SAFM (10.1), due to appear in early 2019, please send a 300-500 word abstract to Ajay Gehlawat (gehlawat@sonoma.edu) by March 15, 2018. Please also include a brief bio with your abstract. Final drafts of accepted proposals will be due by July 15, 2018. Please see SAFM’s guidelines for further details regarding submitting and formatting, and feel free to email beforehand with any inquiries.