Communicating Conservation: Role of Cinema in influencing global environmental consciousness (HM490)

BTech
DA-IICT/Gandhinagar
Course Instructor: Anirban Dutta Gupta

Course Placement: Communicating Conservation: Role of Cinema in influencing global environmental consciousness (HM490 is an Open Elective course for BTech Students.

Course Format: Full semester course with Bi-weekly series of lectures and practical sessions followed by mentored practical applications (on-campus and off-campus)

Course Content:

The aim of this course is to present to the students a detailed look at the influence of audio-visual products (including documentary films) in creating and sustaining global, and specifically Indian, environmental consciousness as well as the role it this medium has played in the creation of the ‘environmental’ or ‘green’ movements of today.

Course Abstract:

The course will be constructed around 5 modules – each supporting and expanding on the previous module. Conservation and environmental movement is complicated arena where multiple skill sets are deployed. One of the stated objective of this course will be to understand this multidisciplinary approach.

The course will begin by exploring our historic understanding of the environmental movement, both globally and in India, and the role played by various individuals and institutions, whose visual documentations have played a critical role in our understanding and appreciation of the natural world; and which has helped in making esoteric and exotic concepts and creatures, approachable and understandable to the general audience.

While the focus will be on the role played by the audio-visual medium, the course will briefly touch upon other forms of ‘recordings of nature’ – from illustrations like the works of Zain Ud-Din or Mark Catesby, naturalist’s diaries, or the photographic work by Joel Sartore and the Photo Ark, and the innovative use of social media by the likes of Yuvan Aves, meant to record, reveal and resonate with the general public.

The following modules will explore how communication can be crafted to provide the impetus that can initiate a movement. To understand this, one will look at design thinking, design systems and approaches to identifying and constructing specific messages which can be used to amplify the intended message.
We would be looking specifically at the role played by documentary films – its form, structure and development and deconstruct selected natural history and ethnographic films – for example films like ‘Serengeti shall not die’ by Bernhard and Michael Grzimek, ‘Only and Axe away’ by P.Baburaj and C.Saratchandran, John Marshals ‘The Hunters’, Flaherty’s ‘Nanook of the North’, ‘The Tomb of the Exhausted’ by Marion Fernandez, ‘Thank you for the rain’ by Kisilu Musya amongst others.

Theoretical and practical inputs will be given on non-fiction filmmaking which will enable the students to produce short film using their mobile cameras.

The objective of this course is not just to provide a theoretical appreciation of the subject but to also apply the concepts in the real-world scenario, through the design and delivery, as a final project in the form of a short environmental communication film on a subject related to the environment and ecology from the immediate surrounding

The students will be expected to participate in class discussions, make presentations, participate in critical and reflective analysis of the readings, lectures and screenings as well as apply discussed concepts in the ‘learning by doing’ mode.

Students will be given various assignments through which they will explore the concepts discussed in class.

Readings will be given to the students which they are expected to complete during the course.

Students will maintain COVID-19 Protocols and precautions at all time.

**Reading List for all Modules:**

**For Module 1:**

1. The Vanishing – *Prerna Singh Bindra* (Selected chapters)
2. The Future of Life – *Edward O Wilson*  
   - Chapters 5 & 6 (Pg.103-148)
3. The World until yesterday – *Jared Diamond*  
   - Chapter: At another Airport (Pg.452-466)
4. The Boilerplate Rhino: Nature in the eye of the beholder – *David Quammen*  
   (Selected chapters)
5. Collapse – *Jared Diamond*  
   - Chapter 15: Big Businesses and the Environment: Different Conditions and Different Outcomes
- Chapter 3. Development (Pg 53)
- Chapter 9. Hope (Pg.195)

For Module 2:

7. Images of Nature: Art of India – *Judith Magee*
   - Introduction (Pg.4 – 15)
8. Natural Histories – *Ed. Tom Baione* (Selected chapters)
9. Towards ecological history of India – *Madhav Gadgil*
10. The paper museum of Cassiano Dal Pozzo – *Rhea Alexandratos*
11. Alexander Marshal and his ‘Curious Booke of Flowers in Miniature’ – *Susan Owen*
12. Forest of Tigers – *Annu Jalais* (Selected chapters)
13. Why indigenous folklore can save animals’ lives – *Arnel Murga*
14. People, Parks and Poverty: Political Ecology and Biodiversity Conservation -
    *William M. Adams & Jon Hutton*
15. Protection, Politics and Protest: Understanding Resistance to Conservation -
    *George Holmes*
16. ‘Tigers are Our Brothers’: Understanding Human-Nature Relations in the Mishmi Hills, Northeast India - *Ambika Aiyadurai*

For Module 3:

17. Is there an Indian way of thinking? – *A K Ramanujan*
18. Key concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies - *Tom O’Sullivan, John Hartley, Danny Saunders, Martin Montgomery & John Fiske* (Selected readings)
19. Optic Clash: Modes of visuality in India – *Shaila Bhatti and Christopher Pinney*
20. Practices of Looking – *Marita Sturken & Lisa Cartwright* (Selected chapters)
21. Design Things and Design Thinking: Contemporary Participatory Design Challenges – *Erling Bjogvinsson, Pelle Ehn & Per-Anders Hillgren*
   - Chapter 1: What is Design (Pg.1 – 7)
   - Chapter 5: Communications (Pg.55 – 67)
   - Chapter 6: Environments (Pg.68 – 83)
   - Chapter 8: Systems (Pg.97 – 111)
23. Design for Social Impact – IDEO (complete workbook to be shared with students)
24. Development Impact & You – Nestaa (complete workbook to be shared with students)
25. The levels of Design Intervention in a complex global scenario – M. P. Ranjan
26. Conservation is Sexy! What Makes This So, and What Does This Make? An Engagement with Celebrity and the Environment - Sian Sullivan
27. Conservation as if People Also Mattered: Policy and Practice of Community-based Conservation - Ashish Kothari, Philip Camill & Jessica Brown

For Module 4:

29. Considering connections between Hollywood and biodiversity conservation – Mathew Silk, Sarah Crawley, Anna Woodhead
31. Man-eaters’ in the Media: Representation of Human-leopard Interactions in India Across Local, National, and International Media - Crystal A. Crown & Kalli F. Doubleday
33. Charismatic Species and Beyond: How Cultural Schemas and Organisational Routines shape Conservation - Monika Krause & Katherine Robinson
34. Framing social movements through documentary films - John A Stover
35. Folk Filmmaking: A Participatory Method for Engaging Indigenous Ethics and Improving Understanding - Adam Pérou Hermans Amir

For Module 5:

36. Representing Reality - Bill Nichols (Selected readings)
37. How Real is the Reality in Documentary Film? - Jill Godmilow & Ann-Louise Shapiro
38. The Interpretive Camera in Documentary Films - Willard van Dyke
39. Signs and Meaning in the Cinema - Peter Wollen (Selected Readings)

Case studies to be presented and discussed during class:
- Building Community Capacity and Support for conserving the Lesser Florican
- Reimagined sustainable supplementary livelihoods post-Covid 19 in Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve
- Using multimedia to archive traditions and indigenous knowledge amongst the Jarawa community
- Ganga: The ribbon of life and its deployment to pause dam construction in the upper Himalayas

**Screening of selected films (In class followed by discussion and analysis):**

- Nanook of the North – Robert Flaherty
- Man of Aran – Robert Flaherty
- In the forest hangs a bridge – Sanjay Kak
- Life on Earth Ep.1 – BBC
- Gaur in my Garden – Rita Bannerji
- Race to Save the Amur Falcon – Shekar Dattatri
- Where the Sarus Sing – Divya Bhardwaj
- Koyaanisqatsi – Godfrey Reggio
- Thank you for the rain - Kisilu Musya
- Mindless Mining – Tragedy of Kudrekmukh – Shekar Dattatri
- Seaspiracy – Ali Tabrizi
- Ganga: Ribbon of Life – Anirban Dutta Gupta
- Uneyholo – Vishvajit Pandya & Anirban Dutta Gupta
- Serengeti shall not die - Bernhard & Michael Grzimek
- Only and Axe away - P.Baburaj & C.Saratchandran
- The Hunters - John Marshal
- Cannibal Tours – Denis O’Rourke

• NOTE: This list may be edited.

**Assessment Method:** Assessment will be based on the following criteria’s:

• Attendance in Class

• Participation in Class

• Presentation and discussions

• Off-class readings
• Final practical assignment

• Examination

**Course Outcome:** The course aims to equip the students with professional knowledge – academic, creative, narrative and technical – of the role played by design and specifically designed audio-visual messaging in generating and sustaining an environmental movement.

Students will gain theoretical knowledge and understanding on the approach, structure and semiotics of non-fiction production for a targeted cause.

Students will gain practical experience in constructing a short campaign through the production of a film.

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**Course Schedule:**

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| Module 1   | - Introduction to ideas of conservation and environmental consciousness in India and abroad  
- Growth of environmental consciousness in India, both current and historical eg, Bishnoi Movement, Chipko Movement, Save Silent Valley, Aarey agitations and efforts to save Lake Pulicat etc  
- Approaches to conservation – the west and the east. | 6 |
| Module 2   | - 'We protect what we love’ – creation of an emotional connect using popular media  
- Recording, archiving and presenting nature through visuals:  
  - illustration  
  - photographs and audio-visuals | 6 |
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| **Module 3** | - Application of design thinking towards addressing systematic challenges of environmental movement  
- Design and its approaches towards addressing conservation challenges – systems approach |
| **Module 4** | - Genesis of the documentary movement and its critical roles in nature conservation – blue chip to investigative journalism.  
- Ethnographic and natural history films – history, evolution and structure  
- Identifying the message – ‘the hook’ and its amplification.  
- The community approach to conservation stewardship and the power of popular and social media. |
| **Module 5** | Module 5 will be the applied module where the students will draw upon the learnings of the previous 4 modules to design and develop, as their final project, a short film that addresses and critical local environmental issue.  
- Specific inputs in Film language and semiotics for non-fiction films  
- Constructing messages through visuals  
- Seeing and listening: interplay of audio and images  
- Role of new media – social media, micro-messaging, shorts, VR & AR, vertical cinema  
- Democratization of the creative space and dissemination |
Course Instructor:

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