

Cinema and the City: Sriram Raghavan's Pune

CAT 124

Cinema and the City is a foundational area of film studies that examines how urban environments shape cinematic form, narrative, and imagination, while cinema in turn produces the city as a space of memory, desire, and social life. This five-week global seminar explores the entangled relationship between cinema, urban space, and genre through the work of filmmaker **Sriram Raghavan**, one of contemporary Indian cinema's most distinctive auteurs of neo-noir storytelling. Anchored in Pune—a city central to Raghavan's own formation as a filmmaker and home to major cinematic institutions such as the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) and the National Film Archive of India (NFAI)—the course treats the city not merely as backdrop but as an active site of cinematic imagination, production, and pedagogy. Combining close textual analysis of Raghavan's films with on-the-ground experiential learning, students will examine how urban spaces are transformed into sites of suspense, moral ambiguity, memory, and desire. Pune becomes both object and laboratory: a living archive through which students encounter the infrastructures of film culture that shape contemporary Indian cinema.

This is an **experiential, production-based seminar**. Students will work directly with FTII's campus facilities, including its **recording studios, editing suites, cinematography and sound labs, screenwriting resources, screening theatres, and archival library holdings**, to develop a series of scaffolded creative projects. These projects will move from concept development and scriptwriting to short audiovisual or experimental film forms inspired by Raghavan's narrative strategies. A key component of the course is a **screenwriting masterclass with Sriram Raghavan**, alongside guest lectures from filmmakers, archivists, and scholars. Students will also participate in curated **excursions** across Pune's cinematic and cultural sites, enabling them to map the city as a layered cinematic geography—historical, industrial, and imaginative. By the end of the seminar, students will have developed both a critical vocabulary for analyzing urban cinema and a portfolio of creative work grounded in place-based filmmaking practice, culminating in a final project that reflects their engagement with Pune as a cinematic city shaped by and shaping Sriram Raghavan's distinctive filmic world.

Week One

City as Gendered Space

Ek Hasina Thi (2004)

Tupur Chatterjee, "Nostalgia and Fear in the Smart City" from *Projecting Desire: Architectures and Moviegoing in Urban India* (2025)

Week Two

City as Infrastructure Network

Johnny Gaddaar (2007)

Debashree Mukherjee, "Speculative Futures" from *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (2020)

Week Three

City as Sensorium / Perceptual Field

Andhadhun (2018)

Ranjani Mazumdar, "Introduction," *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (2007).

Week Four**City as Post-Industrial Temporal Zone***Badlapur* (2015)

Ranjani Mazumdar, “Friction, Collision, and the Grotesque: The Dystopic Fragments of Bombay Cinema” (2010).

Week Five**City as Atmospheric / Dispersed Cinema***Merry Christmas* (2024)

Gyan Prakash, “Introduction” from *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City* (2011).

Guest Speaker- Sriram Raghavan (screenwriting masterclass)

Assignment Structure for Cinema and the City (At-a-Glance)

Type	Frequency	Description
Creative Labs	Weekly	Scaffolded production work (audio/visual/editing)
Final Project	Week 5	Short film (Pune-based)
Final Essay	Week 5	Cinema–city–industry synthesis

Appendix: Integrated Excursion Plan, Learning Outcomes, and Assignments**Global Seminar: Bollywood + Cinema and the City (Pune/Mumbai)**

This five-week excursion plan integrates Bollywood and Cinema and the City: Sriram Raghavan’s Pune through a coordinated sequence of site visits that connect film industry, urban space, spectatorship, and creative practice. Each excursion aligns with weekly films and readings while scaffolding analytical and production-based work.

Excursion Plan (5 Weeks)**Week 1 — Institution & Archive (Pune)**

- Film and Television Institute of India + National Film Archive of India
- Focus: film education, archives, and knowledge production
- Output: Journal + Screening Notes (institutional and archival analysis)
- **Creative Lab:** Archival-to-digital exercise—students create a short **visual dossier** (still photography + scanned materials + voiceover) translating archival objects into a narrative sequence using FTH editing labs.

Week 2 — Exhibition & Spectatorship (Pune)

- Watch a film at the historic **Rahul 70mm** theater
- Focus: single-screen culture, popular spectatorship, cinematic publics
- Output: Screening Notes + Short Ethnography (audience and space)
- **Creative Lab: Audio ethnography**—students record ambient sound (crowd reactions, ticketing, street noise) and produce a 2–3 minute **sound piece** on spectatorship using FTH

sound labs

Week 3 — Industry & Production (Mumbai Day Trip)

- Goregaon (Film City) + Prime Focus + Prasad Labs
- Focus: production systems, scale, neoliberal industry
- Output: Short Assignment (“film industry as urban machine”) + Journal
- **Creative Lab: Continuity and coverage exercise**—students shoot short footage (or simulated rushes) and assemble a **continuity-edited scene** in FTII editing suites, focusing on industrial norms of storytelling

Week 4 — Stardom & Urban Modernity (Mumbai Day Trip)

- Andheri (YRF Studio, Dharma Productions, Red Chilies Entertainment) + Bandra (Pali Hill)
- Focus: stardom, infrastructure, mobility, cinematic imaginaries
- Output: Discussion Post + Journal (stardom and urban space)
- **Creative Lab: Still photography + mise-en-scène study**—students produce a curated photo series on “star spaces” and urban aspiration, later edited into a **visual montage** (with music track)

Week 5 — Urban Field Lab & Production (Pune)

- Camp Area; Laxmi Road; Koregaon Park + return to Film and Television Institute of India
- Focus: city as sensorium; from analysis to filmmaking
- Includes masterclass with Sriram Raghavan
- Output: Final Creative Project + Reflective Essay
- **Creative Lab: Final production**—students shoot and edit a short film (noir or melodrama) on location in Pune, integrating sound design, editing, and narrative structure