

Tuesday
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SEMINAR SERIES



Natak: Political Theater and Political Deceit in Mumbai

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This lecture will discuss cash-compensated crowds that assemble for political gatherings—protest marches, road blocks, campaign rallies—in the Indian city of Mumbai. Popular and scholarly discourse tends to dismiss paid crowds as inauthentic, even fraudulent forms of political assembly. This research instead explores cash-compensated crowds as instances of political utterance and representation, probing the dueling moral registers by means of which the theatrical character of political life in Mumbai is evaluated: as either political theater or political deceit. On some occasions, cash-compensated mass assembly are characterized as "meaningless" and as "only natak" (drama, theater)—suggesting a normative understanding of what a "meaningful" political rally should be. But in other contexts, we see that it is precisely its very theatrical quality that renders a rally compelling or convincing at all. Professor Björkman's talk will outline when—in what contexts—*natak* is evaluated as a compelling idiom of political utterance, communication, and representation, and when political theater is described as "*only natak*"—a disdainful dismissal that suggests something is only theatrical when it ought not to be—or indeed is pretending not to be. Taking theatricality and performance seriously as an idiom of political speech and representation, the accounts suggest, may offer one way out of the impasses of post-truth political present where political communication tends to be either evaluated for its truth value or else dismissed as lies. Attending to explicitly theatrical dimensions of political life calls attention to a richer array of ideas and moral-evaluative frameworks.

12:00 - 1:30 PM | LIGHT REFRESHMENTS SERVED

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