

COURSE PROPOSAL
EVERYDAY LIFE IN SOUTH ASIA: BEYOND THE CLICHÉS
GLOBAL SEMINAR SESSION II

1. Course Description

Popular representations of South Asia abound in clichés: extreme poverty and unimaginable luxury, cosmopolitan cities and rural hamlets, ascetics and call center workers – we are all familiar with these juxtapositions in images, films, and popular books about the region. In this course, we will ask: what do these clichés do to our understanding of South Asia? Do they reveal some deeper truth about the region, or are they reflections of how South Asia has been historically imagined by others? How do we get beneath or beyond these representations?

We will respond to these questions in this course by drawing, primarily, on the work of anthropologists. One of the strengths of anthropology’s methodology—ethnography—is that it captures the complexities of everyday life. In this course, we will explore how people in South Asia live on a day-to-day basis, while also attending to how major historical events, such as colonialism and the Partition of India and Pakistan, continue to shape contemporary life and politics. Although most of our course readings will be about India, we will also draw on scholarly work from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh, to develop a transnational perspective on the region.

While this course offers an in-depth engagement with a specific region of the world, South Asia has also been a key site from which scholars have thought through major themes, including social organization, everyday life, religion, nationalism, violence/conflict, and globalization. As such, this course also offers an engagement with anthropological theory, which will allow you to question and deconstruct dominant clichés about South Asia.

No prerequisites

2. Course Objectives

By the completion of the course, students will have developed:

- A working knowledge with historical and contemporary examples of how caste, gender, political violence, and religious practices shape everyday life in South Asia
- A basic understanding of key concepts, theoretical approaches, and issues of concern in the anthropology and historiography of South Asia
- Critical writing and thinking skills, including engaging and synthesizing multiple perspectives (both scholarly and popular), offering cogent and clear argumentation in written work, and putting class discussions and readings into a broader intellectual context

3. Course requirements

- a. Attendance and participation – 20%
- b. Short response paper – 30%
- c. Final research paper – 50%

For your final research paper, you will write a book review of a contemporary, popular, nonfiction text about South Asia for an educated but popular audience, such as the *London Review of Books* or *The New Yorker*. Your book review should be a *critical assessment* of a popular representation of South Asia, showing what anthropological, ethnographic, or historical perspectives they use, miss, or could benefit from. Your book

review should synthesize and compare different works with each other, including readings from our course as well as secondary/outside sources (unlike those publications, you will be expected to cite other scholarly works in your book reviews). Some examples of books you could write about are:

Eat, Pray, Love – Elizabeth Gilbert

Behind the Beautiful Forevers – Katherine Boo

In Spite of the Gods: The Rise of Modern India – Edward Luce

Holy Cow: An Indian Adventure - Sarah MacDonald

4. Course Schedule

There are two required books for this course:

Butalia, Urvashi. 2000. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Roy, Arundhati. 1997. *The God of Small Things*. Harper Collins: New York.

Week 1: Introduction

Bose, Sugata and Ayesha Jalal

2011 South Asian History: An Introduction. In *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-12.

Cohn, Bernard S.

1987 Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture. In *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays*. Delhi: Oxford U.P. pp. 136-69.

Ghosh, Amitav

2002 The Imam and the Indian. *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, pp. 1-13.

Week 2: Partition and its Aftermath

Butalia, Urvashi

2000 *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press (entire book).

In class film viewing: *1947 Earth*, Deepa Mehta, 1998

Possible field visit:

- Partition Museum Project (Amritsar) or visiting a museum in New Delhi that has a Partition exhibition

Week 3: Castes of Mind

Dirks, Nicholas B.

1992 Castes of Mind. *Representations* 37: 56-78.

Mines, Diane and Sarah Lamb

2010 Seven Prevalent Misconceptions about India's Caste System. *Everyday Life in South Asia*, pp. 153-4.

Raheja, Gloria Goodwin
1996 Caste, Colonialism and the Speech of the Colonized: Entextualization and
Disciplinary Control in India. *American Ethnologist* 23(3): 494-513.

Film viewing: *Ankur* (the Seedling), Shyam Benegal, 1974

Short response paper due

Week 4: Representations of Caste

Roy, Arundhati. 1997. *The God of Small Things*. Harper Collins: New York.

Possible field visit:

- Visit to CRY's missions in Kerala on issues of child rights: <http://www.cry.org/projects/rights-a-society-for-human-rights/>
- Visit to Amrita University projects on caste

Week 5: Aspiration and Globalization

Liechty, Mark

2002 'Out Here in Kathmandu': Youth and the Contradictions of Modernity in
Urban Nepal. In *Everyday Life in South Asia*. Diane P. Mines and Sarah Lamb,
eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 37-47.

Chua, Jocelyn L.

2014 *In Pursuit of the Good Life: Aspiration and Suicide in Globalizing South India*.
Berkeley: University of California Press (selections).

Possible field visits:

- Visit to Tibetan Youth Congress office, Dharamsala