

Spring 2017

ANTH 331:
**Cultures
(and Controversies)
in South Asia**

WHEN: Mondays & Wednesdays, 3:30-4:50pm
WHERE: 240A McKenzie Hall

Instructor: Prof. Bharat Venkat, bvenkat@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-3 pm, 357 Condon Hall

Graduate Assistant: Rucha Chandvankar, ruchac@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays 1-3pm, 366B Condon Hall

WHAT IS SOUTH ASIA?

In the 5th century BC, the Greek traveler Herodotus described a land on the outermost edges of the known world in which dark-skinned tribes lived together like “brute beasts.”

In the early 14th century, the Franciscan missionary Odoric of Pordenone provided a first-hand account of religious devotees who chopped off parts of their body as a sacrifice to their god.

In the 19th century, the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel wrote of a people trapped in a world of fantasy, a people lacking both history and reason.

In the 20th century, the American filmmakers Steven Spielberg and George Lucas brought to the big screen the story of a slave-owning, monkey-brain-eating, human-sacrificing cult in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.

Outside of South Asia, such macabre images of a timeless land have increasingly been complemented by more mundane figures of everyday life on the subcontinent. In this course, our goal will be to complicate these visions of South Asia, both the fantastical and the ordinary, by examining the ways in which the subcontinent has been framed and interpreted by the people who live there. Rather than trying to get down to a singular truth about South Asia, this course focuses on some controversies that have contributed to the shaping of the subcontinent, its people and their ways of life. Thinking through controversies, debates and disagreements will allow us to see how South Asia has never been just one thing.

Throughout the quarter, we will analyze a selection of historical and contemporary controversies, including those related to colonialism & independence, caste & its abolition, religious nationalism & secularism, science & medicine, environmental change, gender, sexuality, kinship, desire and language. We will, for example, examine conflicts around how religious epics are retold and imagined, as well as debates about kissing in Bollywood film.

We will approach these controversies by reading a range of texts by anthropologists, historians and other scholars of South Asia. We will also grapple with primary texts by critical figures in South Asian history, such as the anti-caste advocate and lawyer B.R. Ambedkar. In addition, we will engage with epic tales of love and loss, on film and on paper.

An important caveat: there are many ways of teaching an introductory course on South Asia. In fact, there are many topics, texts and films that I would have liked to include. Given the limited time that we have together, this course will focus primarily on selected topics related to modern India, understood here as the period ranging from colonial rule to the present. If there are other subjects you'd like to learn more about, please do not hesitate to speak with me after class or during office hours.

There are no prerequisites for this course, other than a curiosity about South Asia and a willingness to engage in challenging conversations about controversial subjects. This course counts toward the Social Science (SSC) and International Cultures (IC) requirements for the bachelor's degree at the University of Oregon.

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

1. To analyze the multiple ways in which a text, a film, a cultural phenomenon or a historical moment have been interpreted in South Asia, as well as what is at stake in these varied interpretations
2. To make sense of controversies, debates and conflicts by locating them within specific social and historical contexts
3. To examine how ideas of identity and difference (race, caste, class, gender, sexuality and so on) have operated in South Asia and in scholarship about South Asia
4. To analytically engage with primary texts, scholarly works, and films

WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW?

This is a lecture course with weekly sections. Lectures will draw from assigned readings but will also introduce additional materials. If you do not come to lecture, you will miss a lot! Sections will be more heavily oriented toward conversation. A good conversation sharpens your thinking and exposes you to new ideas. If you fear speaking in class, challenge yourself to make a comment or ask a question a certain number of times each week. Your active engagement in discussions will count toward your participation grade.

We will take a **5-minute break** in the middle of class. Stretch, breathe, use the bathroom.

Laptops and other electronic devices are highly discouraged. These can be a distraction for yourself and for others, and we want to create an environment that encourages engaged learning. When you're looking at Facebook or buying new shoes online, the people sitting

around you are unwillingly brought along for the ride. If you require the use of an electronic device in class, please use it wisely. Students should feel free to text/email/etc. during the break.

Office Hours. If you have any questions about your performance in the course, please come to office hours as early as possible. The longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to get back on track. You may also attend office hours with either the GTF or the professor to address any difficulties with the course or to further discuss any of the topics covered in class. If you have irreconcilable scheduling conflicts, please contact the GTF or professor via email to set up an alternative time to meet.

Official course communication will occur in class, through email and via Canvas. Any changes to the syllabus will be sent in an email and/or announced via Canvas. Students are responsible to keep up-to-date on any changes to the syllabus. Final grades will also be posted to Canvas.

HOW CAN YOU DO WELL IN THIS COURSE?

Read *before* you come to lecture. Readings provide a shared foundation for our discussions. The materials for this course include scholarly work by anthropologists, historians and social critics. Please bring the readings to both lecture and section so that we can refer to specific passages in the texts. You will have about 30 pages of reading per lecture, and generally no more than about 60 pages for the week. On average, readings should take you about 3-4 hours per week to complete, although some weeks will require more reading and others less. It is highly recommended that you start reading early for lectures with heavy reading loads. If you are confused by something in the readings, you should 1.) read it again, 2.) look up new terms on the internet and 3.) ask questions in lecture, section and office hours. Recommended readings provide additional coverage of the topic under discussion, but there is no expectation that you will read these texts during the term. If you have any concerns about the readings, please do not hesitate to come to office hours.

Take notes (in the margins or in a separate notebook) while you read, as well as in class, as this will help you process the materials. Some questions to consider while reading:

- 1.) What are the author's central arguments or main points?
- 2.) What evidence does the author use to support their argument?
- 3.) What ideas or authors are being argued against?
- 4.) What assumptions does the author rely on to make their argument?
- 5.) Do you find the author's argument convincing? Why or why not?
- 6.) What surprised you about the reading? What did you learn?
- 7.) What experiences in your life resonate with the reading?

Turn assignments in, on time. Late work is not accepted in this course and will receive a zero. Please notify me as soon as possible if a serious issue arises that hinders the completion of an assignment, the taking of an exam or your attendance in class. Rather than waiting until the term is over or nearly over, please speak with the GTF or the professor as soon as

possible. Make-ups and extensions will not be granted without a documented or previously-established reason, such as a written note from your doctor or the observation of a religious holiday. There is no extra credit offered in this course.

Proofread your work. Ask a friend to proofread it again, or take it to a Writing Tutor at Knight Library. Spelling and grammar errors, as well as typos, will negatively affect your grade. All work must be fully referenced using the simplified model of author's last name followed by page number (for example, Venkat 146).

GRADING

Your regular **attendance and participation in both lecture (10%) and section (10%)** are critical to the success of this seminar. It is important that you show up on time prepared for discussion, having first completed the readings.

The **in-class midterm (25%)** will focus on material drawn from both the texts and the lectures over the first half of the course. This exam will include both short-answer and multiple choice questions.

For seven weeks of your choosing, you will write a **summary of a news article (25%)** loosely related to the assigned readings, drawn from one of the following South Asian newspapers or periodicals available online: *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu*, *Mumbai Mirror*, *Telegraph*, *Deccan Herald*, *Deccan Chronicle* or *Caravan*. Summaries should be between 300-350 words in length and uploaded to Canvas by Wednesday at 9pm (the day before section). Summaries should briefly summarize the focus of the article (who, what, where, when, why), explain the significance of the news item and make explicit connections with the course readings from the week. Assume that your reader knows very little about South Asia. As such, you must explain to your reader who the people in the article are and how they relate to one another, while simultaneously laying out the broader context of the news item. You will likely have to rely on Wikipedia and other internet sources to fill in the blanks. This is encouraged! **However, you cannot under any circumstances copy the words of others.** Plagiarism is unacceptable (see below). This is a good opportunity for you to learn how to paraphrase or describe materials in your own words. On certain weeks, you will be asked to briefly present on your chosen news article, which will count toward your grade. This should not require any additional preparation on your part.

The **final paper (30%)** will require you to substantively, generously and critically engage with at least four texts from the course to explore a contemporary controversy that you have learned about from your engagement with Indian newspapers and periodicals. You should work closely with your GTF in choosing the topic of your final paper. The topic you choose should allow you to seriously engage with course materials. Papers should draw out the various perspectives on the issue under discussion. You will also need to connect the various arguments and concepts from class and from our readings to your topic. Papers should be 10 pages in length, double-spaced and with 1-inch margins, in Times New Roman with 12-point font. Submit on Canvas and deposit a hard copy in my mailbox in Condon 308. Due Wednesday, June 14 by 4pm.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University of Oregon's policies on academic honesty and plagiarism can be found at conduct.uoregon.edu. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. Students should not turn in assignments or exam questions written by anyone else, nor should they include text written by someone else without citing the source. Paraphrased material must also be cited. This includes material from the Internet, as well as material from class lectures. **Plagiarized work will receive a failing grade.** If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the GTF before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at researchguides.uoregon.edu/citingplagiarism.

REQUIRED BOOKS

The majority of the required readings will be posted online to Canvas. Students are required to print these readings, read them carefully prior to coming to lecture, take notes, and to bring both texts and notes to class.

Texts not posted to Canvas are available for purchase at the Duck Store, the University of Oregon's Bookstore at 895 East 13th Street, as well as on reserve at the Knight Library.

Required Texts

R.K. Narayan, *The Ramayana*

Recommended

Sangita Gopal, *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood Cinema*

Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion and the Social in Modern India*

Matthew Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*

ACCOMODATIONS

Please communicate with me, preferably within the first week of class, if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your learning or participation. Of course, if concerns arise later in the term, do not hesitate to let me know. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall, either by phone (541-346-1155), by e-mail (oruoacc@uoregon.edu) or on the web (acc.uoregon.edu).

GRADING SCALE (as established by the Department of Anthropology)

A+ = 98-100%

A = 93-97.9%

A- = 90-92.9%

B+ = 87-89.9%

B = 83-86.9%

B- = 80-82.9%

C+ = 77-79.9%

C = 73-76.9%

C- = 70-72.9%

D+ = 67-69.9%

D = 63-66.9%

D- = 60-62.9%

F = 59.9% and below

If the class is taken P/NP, a C- or higher is required to pass the course

Questions about your grade? If you have questions regarding a grade you have received, your first line of action is to meet with the GTF to discuss the matter. If you fail to come to a satisfactory resolution, please meet with the professor to resolve the issue.

CLASS SCHEDULE

<p style="text-align: center;">UNIT 1: Epic Controversies in the Making of Modern South Asia</p>
--

Monday, April 3, 2017

IN CLASS:

A quick and dirty history of South Asia * Geography * Religion * Language * Governance *
What is South Asia anyway? * Orientalism * Anthropology & History * Subaltern studies *
Colonialism & Postcolonialism * Overview of the Course * Expectations & Protocols

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

A.K. Ramanujan, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyanas*: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on
Translation"

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:

A.K. Ramanujan, "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking?: an Informal Essay"

IN CLASS:

A Controversial Syllabus * The Rushdie Affair * M.F. Husain's paintings * Wendy Doniger's
The Hindus * Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* * Perumal Murugan's *One-Part Woman* *
Censorship & Free Speech

Monday, April 10, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

R.K. Narayan, *The Ramayana*, Ch. 1-6 (start reading early!)

IN CLASS:

Valmiki * Kamban * Periyar * Ambedkar * Amar Chitra Katha * Doordarshan * *Sita Sings the
Blues* * *Sita's Ramayana* * Southeast Asia

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

R.K. Narayan, *The Ramayana*, Ch. 7-14, Epilogue (start reading early!)

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:

Stanley Tambiah, "Hindu Nationalism, the Ayodhya Campaign, and the Babri Masjid"
Deepak Mehta, "Naming the Deity, Naming the City: Rama and Ayodhya"

IN CLASS:

Communal violence * Hindu nationalism * Screening of *Ram Ke Naam (In the Name of God)*

UNIT 2:
Caste, Colonialism & the Meaning of Freedom

Monday, April 17, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Introduction

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:

Ayesha Jalal & Sugata Bose, "The Partition of India and the Creation of Pakistan"

IN CLASS:

The British East India Company * Empire * Colonial rule * Partition * Religious nationalism
* the Nation-state

Wednesday, April 19, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Ch. 4, 13, 14, 16, 17

IN CLASS:

Ahimsa * What is non-violence? * Non-Cooperation * *Satyagraha* * *Swaraj* * *Swadeshi*

Monday, April 24, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

Nicholas Dirks, "Castes of Mind"

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:

Matthew Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*

IN CLASS:

Varna, *jāti* and *casta* * the hymn of Purusha, the Cosmic Being * hierarchy, centrality and
mutuality * the colonial census * purity & pollution * commensalism

Wednesday, April 26, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

B.R. Ambedkar, "The Annihilation of Caste," Sections 4-6

B.R. Ambedkar, "Waiting for a Visa"

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:

Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion and the Social in Modern India*

IN CLASS:

Pariah * *Harijan* * *Dalit* * Untouchability * Anti-Caste Movements * Anupama Rao on
Ambedkar * Conversion to Buddhism * the Mandal Commission

*****Monday, May 1, 2017***
IN-CLASS MIDTERM**

UNIT 3: Pleasures & Dangers: Sex, Kinship & Desire

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

Lalitha Gopalan, *The Cinema of India*, "Introduction"

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:

Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, "Introduction"
Sangita Gopal, *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood Cinema*

IN CLASS:

Bollywood * Regional film industries * Kissing * Kinship * Conjugalities * Guest lecture by
Dr. Sangita Gopal, Department of English, University of Oregon

Monday, May 8, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

Veena Oldenburg, "The Roop Kanwar Case: Feminist Responses"

IN CLASS:

Indian kinship * *Sati* * Widow remarriage * Gender * Law * Mother India

Wednesday, May 10, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

Geeta Patel, "On *Fire*: Sexuality and its Incitements"

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:

Lawrence Cohen, "The Pleasures of Castration"

IN CLASS:

Sexuality * Queer activism * The figure of the *Hijra* * HIV/AIDS * Section 377 * Screening
of *Fire*

Monday, May 15, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

Brian Larkin, "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel
Modernities"

IN CLASS:

Globalization * Transnationalism * Diaspora * Translation * Difference * Authenticity

UNIT 4: Science, Medicine and a Changing Environment

Wednesday, May 17, 2017

REQUIRED READING:
Radhika Govindrajan, “Monkey Business”

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:
Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus*, Ch. 5, “Humans, Animals and the Gods in the *Rig Veda*”
Radhika Govindrajan, “‘The Goat that Died for the Family’: Animal Sacrifice and Interspecies Kinship in India’s Central Himalayas”

IN CLASS:
Environmental change in India * Human-animal interactions * Sacrifice * Guest lecture by Dr. Radhika Govindrajan, Department of Anthropology, University of Washington

Monday, May 22, 2017

REQUIRED READING:
Naveeda Khan, “Dogs and Humans and What Earth Can Be: Filaments of Muslim Ecological Thought”

IN CLASS:
Natural topographies * Erosion * Differential effects of climate change * Forms of denial * Islam in South Asia

Wednesday, May 24, 2017

*****May 29, 2017 – MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY*****

Wednesday, May 31, 2017

REQUIRED READING:
Zia Mian, “Fevered with Dreams of the Future: The Coming of the Atomic Age to Pakistan”

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:
David Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*, Introduction

IN CLASS:
A tool of empire * Science studies * Infrastructure * Alternative sciences * Atomic futures * Security

Monday, June 5, 2017

REQUIRED READING:

Jean Langford, *Fluent Bodies: Ayurvedic Remedies for Postcolonial Imbalances*, Ch. 1: “(Re)Inventing Ayurveda”

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:

Jean Langford, “Ayurvedic Interiors: Person, Space, and Episteme in Three Medical Practices”

IN CLASS:

Ayurveda * Biomedicine * Medical Pluralism

June 7, 2017

Review and Wrap-Up

June 14, 2017

Final Paper due by 4pm.

Submit on Canvas and deposit a hard copy in my mailbox in Condon 308.