SOAN 257-00 Culture and Politics in India

Fall 2020, Tues. & Thurs. 10:20-12:10 pm; Online

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Course Description
India is a region of immense contrasts and diversities which, in the Western imagination, include monks, saints, snake charmers, oppressed women, bullock carts, call centers, and slums. What is distinctive about this part of the world where more than one billion people live? This course will explore social structures and institutions in India--through a focus on key areas of everyday life such as systems of stratification (class, gender and caste), economy, governance, family, religion, and protest movements. Close attention will be given to globalization, religious nationalism and militarism as dominant trends affecting contemporary India.

Questions we will consider include: How has India been represented in the Western imagination and why do such representations matter? How is gender imbricated in this western imagination? What impact have these representations had on Indian society? What are the forces of modernity and tradition in India and how do they affect different strata on Indian society? Is India’s population the cause of its problems? What are the similarities and differences in systems of stratification in India and the U.S.? Are Indian women uniquely oppressed? What is globalization and how does it impact different regions and groups of Indian? What is Hindu nationalism and why is it important? Why is militarization on the rise in India?

Course materials include, in addition to the academic books and articles, documentaries, Bollywood films, slides, web-based resources, short stories and newspaper cuttings.

Texts and Materials:
1. Somini Sengupta. 2016. The End of Karma: Hope and Fury among India’s Young. Norton. (hereafter Sengupta bk);
3. Craig Jeffrey & John Harris. 2014. Keywords for Modern India. Oxford University Press. (Keywords bk);
5. Course Readings – series of articles on moodle

Websites to Check
https://kafila.online/

“This team blog is a collaborative practice of radical political and media critique, and an engagement with the present. Kafila – a Hindi word derived from Arabic, it means a caravan, a procession or a collectivity in travel. It could be a kafila of a nomadic group, a pack, a procession, a parade or simply the most pervasive yet unacknowledged figure of the modern world – the refugee/s in all its forms – including development refugees: people rendered homeless and placeless by capitalism and the relentless modern
drive of mapping, accounting, categorizing and normalizing – in short, defining a place and a norm for every one and everything, which leaves most people without place. Kafila is a team effort of concerned individuals – scholars, activists, writers, journalists – to create a space for critical engagement on a wide range of issues of the contemporary world.”

https://scroll.in/
Latest news, in-depth news, political news from India

https://thewire.in/
The Wire is an Indian news and opinion website founded in 2015. Its reporters have won several national and international awards, including three Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Awards and the CPJ International Press Freedom Award. Published in English, Hindi, Urdu and Marathi.

Caste & Race
https://www.equalitylabs.org/
“Equality Labs is an Ambedkarite South Asian progressive power-building organization that uses community research, cultural and political organizing, popular education and digital security to fight the oppressions of caste apartheid, Islamophobia, white supremacy, and religious intolerance.”

Feminist & Queer Sites
“Agents of Ishq is a multi-media project about sex, love and desire. Or, to put it another way, we make cool video, beautiful images and great audio about sex, love and desire in India.”
http://agentsofishq.com/

“The Ladies Finger (TLF) is an online women’s magazine delivering fresh and witty perspectives on politics, culture, health, sex, work and everything in between. We are smart, positive and alive to absurdity and adventure. Our work provides vital info and hope to readers everywhere.”
http://theladiesfinger.com/

Feminism in India
“Intersectional feminism – Desi Style”
https://feminisminindia.com/

Gaylaxy Magazine
“As an archive, a resource for queer news and events, a platform for people to talk about issues no one is talking about, Gaylaxy continues to strive to be a publication that is regular, wide-ranging and of impeccable quality.”
http://www.gaylaxymag.com/about-us/

Archives
PARI – People’s Archive of Rural India
https://ruralindiaonline.org/pages/about/
“Can a project’s success be judged on the basis of its never being completed? Yes, if it’s a living archive of the world’s most complex countryside. Rural India is in many ways the most diverse part of the planet. Its 833 million people include distinct societies speaking well over 700 languages, some of them thousands of years old. The People’s Linguistic Survey of India tells us the country as a whole speaks some 780 languages and uses 86 different scripts. But in terms of provision for schooling up to Class 7, just 4 per cent of those 780 are covered. Most Indian languages are mainly spoken by people in rural India.”
Course Requirements

Attendance & Participation: 30% of your grade
Attendance and participation are critically important. An ability to communicate effectively is an important life skill. My goal is to help you develop good discussion techniques. Therefore, I expect everyone to be an active participant. This means being an attentive listener, addressing the questions asked, and promoting a positive atmosphere. We will strive to create a respectful and friendly atmosphere. I realize that people have different styles of participation. While evaluating your participation, I will consider not just your verbal contributions, but also your willingness to listen to others and your completion of occasional written assignments. You are required to complete the assigned readings for the day before coming to class.

During lecture, I will often summarize current research on the day’s topic. You will be reading a representative sample of that research, but the summary will not be in your readings. It will also be difficult to recreate large group discussions we may have from someone else’s notes. I want you to actively engage with the material, so your participation in lecture means more than just being there, but rather contributing your ideas and questions that will push all of us to think harder. Attendance will be graded as follows: 0-1 absence=A; 2 absences=A- ; 3 absences=B+; 4 absences=B; 5 absences=B-; 6 absences =F

2 Map Quizzes – ungraded
You will be required to locate the following on a map: India and its neighboring countries and their capitals in South Asia; all the different states within India; the capital of each state; and the main language spoken in each state. If you do well in these ungraded quizzes, that may positively influence a final border-line grade.

1 Presentation: 10% of your grade
You are required to do one presentation. I believe that every student in this class can master the material and in turn lead a mini-discussion section on it. Those who have a say in how and what they learn, ultimately glean more from the material and enjoy the educational process more. In that vein, each student will summarize the main arguments in the assigned readings and facilitate discussion for 20-30 minutes once during the quarter. S/he will be “extra familiar” with the required reading assignments, arrive with questions or a format prepared, and be responsible for any lagging discussions. You need to email me an outline of your presentation and discussion questions by 9pm of the day before your presentation.

2 Reflection Papers: 30% of your grade (15% each)
In order to foster your critical thinking and analytical skills you are required to write a total of two short reflection papers (5-6 double spaced pages each). In these reflection papers you need to do some critical and careful analysis of the course material, based on the questions below. Although these are not full-fledged, formal essays, you need to engage in depth with the assigned readings. You can draw upon personal experience (which means you can use “I”), but your experience must be analyzed and connected to your analysis of the readings. This means that pure emotional reaction, or journal-like writing, will not serve you well. Papers turned in late will be down-graded for each late day (unless you fall ill or have special needs and have talked to me about alternative arrangements before hand). Hand-out forthcoming.

Required Reflection Paper #1 - Problematizing the Western Lens (approx. 5 -7pgs)
Provide a critical analysis of modern Western conceptions of South Asia. What are the forces that have shaped these views? How does gender feature in these conceptions? (Please note: your paper should address all 3 questions listed above and should engage with the writing of Milton Singer, Amartya Sen, Uma Narayan, and Chandra Mohanty). This paper is important in that it will serve as a building-block for your final paper. When you work on this paper, be sure to take notes on your personal reactions (thoughts, feelings, preconceived notions, unexamined received conceptions) to the readings on western conceptions of India and South Asia. Though, you don’t need to include these reactions in this paper, they will come in handy when you write your final paper.

Reflection Paper #2 – approx. 5-7pgs
For your second reflection paper, pick any one of areas from the list below and/or concoct your own topic of interest, generate some conceptual questions (and have them approved by me). Please turn your paper in at the end of the week we cover that topic in class.

Potential Paper Topics
- Family and Gender Relations
- Feminism and the Indian women’s movement
- Political institutions and processes
- Indian economy and inequities of class
- Population
- Comparative Analysis of any one of the following:
  - caste and race in the U.S. and India
  - democracy in the U.S. and India
  - religious fundamentalism in the U.S. and India
  - globalization in the U.S. and India

Other Potential Reflection Paper Topics
Caste & Class
Define and describe caste, Varna and Jaati. Why can’t caste to reduced to class? Explain why class is useful, and yet insufficient to fully explain caste. Compare and contrast affirmative action policies in India and U.S.A. Be sure to engage with the writings of Gail Omvedt, Ghanshyam Shah, Laura Jenkins, and P. Sainath.

Dalit Movement
What is the Dalit movement? What are its aims, achievements and history? Who was Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar? Please engage with the writings of Eleanor Zelliot, Gail Omvedt, Fisher and Panniah.

Religious Nationalism
What is religious nationalism and how is it different from secular nationalism in the context of South Asia? What was the role of religious nationalism in the 1947 partition of British-India into India, Pakistan and Bangladesh? (Please note: your essay should address all 3 questions and engage with the perspectives of Suvir Kaul, Menon and Bhasin, and Urvashi Butalia.)

Globalization
What is economic globalization in South Asia? What are the roles of the State and of the free markets in globalization? How does globalization impact different groups/strata’s of people (such as different classes, castes, women, farmers etc) in South Asia? What are some social movement responses to globalization in South Asia? (Please note that your essay should address all 4 questions and engage with the assigned readings.)
**Final Term paper: 30% of your grade**
This formal essay should be approximately 15 pages, double spaced. It is due during exam week. Pick either option A or B.

**Option A: Research Paper**
In it you will have a chance to explore some of the readings in more depth and generate your own argument about it. I will be looking for an arguable thesis that the paper supports well with textual analysis that does not simply restate lecture material. The previous assignments (reflection papers) in the course will should provide you with useful practice for the kind of analytical thinking and writing this paper requires. This formal essay will help you hone your ability to construct a thoughtful, multifaceted argument and express it clearly. I require a one page paper proposal (double spaced, typed) to be approved by me before you start writing your paper.

**Option B: Autobiographical paper** charting your journey through this course (handout attached).

**Grading Distribution:**
- Attendance and participation: 30%
- Reflection papers (2): 30%
- Presentation (1): 10%
- Final Paper: 30%
- Total: 100%

**Special Needs**
It is important to me that this course be accessible for all students, so please let me know if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction or evaluation procedures in order to enable you to participate more fully. If you have accessibility concerns or special needs that may affect your work in this course, please talk to me at the beginning of the quarter.

**Schedule of Readings**
Please bear in mind that unforeseen circumstances may require changes in this schedule from time to time. So keep yourself up to date about daily reading assignments. If you miss class you are responsible for any changes in the syllabus announced during that class

**Contours of Diversity in India: Geography, Language & Peoples**

**Week 1**
**T., Sept. 15**, Introduction and Overview of course (requirements & assignments etc.)

The Black Lives Matter movement, Race, Caste – The emergence of the George Floyd Memorial Site (38th & Chicago Ave, Minneapolis)

**Th. Sept. 17** - Required Readings:
DeVotta bk,
  - Introduction by DeVotta
  - India: a Geographic Preface by Dutt


In-class viewing:

*India: Country Watch* (2013 Profile – 6 mins)

*Freedom from the Story of India* by Michael Wood (54 minutes)

OR

*The Day India burned* – by the BBC – on YouTube (60 minutes)

**Orientalism and India: Problematizing Western Lenses**

**Week 2**

T, sept. 22 – Required Readings:
Keywords bk – Culture; Colonialism

on Moodle
- Milton Singer, “Passage to More than India: A sketch of changing European and American Images”
- Amartya Sen, “Indian Traditions and the Western Imagination”
- Vijay Prasad, “Of the mysterious East” & “Of the oriental menagerie”

Th., Sept.24 – Gendering Orientalism
Required Reading: on Moodle
- Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes”
- Kavita Krishnan, “Nirbhaya film: solidarity is what we want, not a civilizing mission” – Online

**Week 3**

T, Sept. 29 – Orientalism contd.
Required Readings: on Moodle
- Narayan, “Cross-cultural connections, border crossings and death by culture”
- Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes Revisited”

Th., Oct. 1 – Orientalism contd.
Required Readings on Moodle
- Narayan, “Through the looking glass darkly”

**OVERVIEW OF INDIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

**Week 4**

T, Oct. 6 – Population & the Demographic Structure of India
Required Readings:
DeVotta bk – “Population, Urbanization, and the Environment” by Sims (read only the population & urbanization sections of the chapter)

Keywords bk – Population; demographic structure

On Moodle:
- Amartya Sen, “Population: Delusion and Reality”
Mary John, “Sex Ratios & Sex Selection in India”

**Th., Oct. 8 – The Indian Economy & Class Stratification**

Required Readings:
Sengupta bk. – “Gates: Keeping out the Lives of Others” pp.57-88

Keywords bk: Development; Class; Capitalism

On Moodle:
- Sekhon bk, Chap. 5, The Economy
- Amartya Sen, “Class in India”
- Roy - “Capitalism: a ghost story”, ch. 1 & 7

Optional:
DeVotta bk – “India’s Economy” by Adams

Documentary film (in class): *Kamala and Raji: Working Women of Ahmedabad* (30 mins DVD)
OR
"*Partners in Crime*" by Paromita Vohra
https://carleton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=75f3eff2-35e8-45ab-a41f-ac3700e9b19c

**Week 5**

**T, Oct. 13 - Social Stratification: Caste & Class**

Required Readings:
Keywords bk – Caste; Class; Dalits
Sengupta bk – Hi-Fi: How to outrun fate”, pp. 25-56

Moodle:
- Sekhon, Chap. 4, Social Stratification
- Definitions – Caste, Varnas, Jaatis (1 page)
- “Seven Prevalent Misconceptions about India’s Caste System”
- Zelliot, “The Meaning of Ambedkar” (pp. 129-142)
- Laura Jenkins, “Race, Caste & Justice: Social Sciences categories and antidiscrimination policies in India and the U.S.” (pp. 747-785)

Optional Reading:
- Omvedt, “Ambedkar and after: The Dalit movement in India” (143-159)
- Deshpande, “Caste inequalities in India Today”

**Th., Oct. 15 – Dalits, Affirmative Action & the politics of Caste, Class, Race**

Required Readings: Moodle
- Isabelle Wilkerson, “Caste” (NY Times excerpt)
- Equality Labs articles
- Sered & Fernadpopulle, *Uninsured in America*
  - “Intro: The Death Spiral” (pp.1-20) – read quickly pp.1-13 & read carefully pp.14-20

Optional
Janaki Abraham, “Contingent Caste Endogamy & patriarchy: lessons from our understanding of Caste”

Documentary film: *Jai Bhim, Comrade*

**Week 6**

*Oct. 19 – Happy Mid-Term Break*

T., Oct. 20 – **Turn in Mid-Term Paper at the beginning of class**

*Jai Bhim, Comrade* (Anand Patwardhan, 2011, 182 minutes)
https://carleton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=520a1699-fb8e-4623-9760-ac3e0104ad3

Reviews, trailers & information about film-maker, Anand Patwardhan: http://patwardhan.com/wp/?page_id=92

Th., Oct. 22 - **Family & Gender Relations**

Film/s on this topic – to be watched on your own outside of class:

- *Queen*, 2014 (by Vikas Bhal, Bollywood movie on Netflix; dvd in libe) OR
- *Monsoon Wedding*, 2009 (by Mira Nair, Hollywood about a marriage amongst an upper middle class, Hindu Punjabi family in Delhi. Dvd in libe; online on Netflix) OR
- *Indian Matchmaker* (Netflix series)

Required Reading:
Menon Bk – Family, pp.1-51
Keywords bk –Family, Caste, Marriage

Moodle:
Meena Khandelwal, “Arranging Love”
Stephanie Coonz, *History of Marriage*, excerpts
Madhu Kishwar, “Love & Marriage”
Balmurli Natrajan, “Towards a (Re)arrangement of Love”

Sengupta bk – Apostates: When they Dared to Love, pp. 163-184

Optional Readings:
Menon bk – Desire, pp. 91-110
Vanita, “Love’s Rites: Same Sex Marriage in India and the West”

Sekhon, Family Diversity and Education
Sekhon, Gender Relations

**Week 7**

T, Oct. 27 – **Feminism & the Indian Women’s Movement**

Required Reading:
Menon bk
   - Victims or Agents
   - Feminists or Women

Keywords bk – Feminism, Equality, Masculinity

Sengupta bk – “Curse: a father’s fears, a daughter’s dreams” pp.185-212

Moodle:
Narayan, “Contesting cultures: westernization, respect for cultures and 3rd world feminists”
Bhasin & Khan, “Some questions on feminism and its relevance in S. Asia”
Rukmini Sen, “Mapping women’s activism in India” (PDFs #3)

Bradley et. al (eds.), 2009. Dowry: Bridging the gap between theory and practice
   - Tomalin, “Introduction” (pp. 1-28)
   - Palriwala, “The spider’s web: seeing dowry, fighting dowry” (pp. 144-176)
   - Basu, “Legacies of the dowry prohibition act in India” (177-196)

Optional Reading:
Kumar, “From Chipko to Sati: the contemporary Indian Women’s Movement”, pp. 58-86

Film: Unlimited Girls: a fearless tale of feminism (94 minutes by Paromita Vohra)

Websites to look over:
“Agents of Ishq is a multi-media project about sex, love and desire. Or, to put it another way, we make cool video, beautiful images and great audio about sex, love and desire in India.”
http://agentsofishq.com/

“The Ladies Finger (TLF) is an online women’s magazine delivering fresh and witty perspectives on politics, culture, health, sex, work and everything in between. We are smart, positive and alive to absurdity and adventure. Our work provides vital info and hope to readers everywhere.”
http://theladiesfinger.com/

Feminism in India - “Intersectional feminism – Desi Style”
https://feminisminindia.com/section/magazine/culture/artwork/

Th, Oct. 29 - Indian Religions: Diversity & Intolerance
Required Readings:
Devotta bk – Religion by Embree
Moodle -
   ➢ Sekhon, Chap. 3, Religions in India
   ➢ Pankaj Mishra, “Ayodhya, the modernity of Hinduism” (from The Temptations of the West)

Week 8
T, Nov. 3 – Indian Electoral System & Political Institutions
Required Readings:
DeVotta bk – “Indian Politics” by Sharma
Keywords bk: Politics, Democracy, State, Civil Society, Class (Changes for next time – Nation/nationalism; citizenship; CUT class)
Moodle:

- Sekhon – Political Institutions and processes
- Mehta, “The state of India’s democracy” (pp. 47-55)
- Hassan, “Indian democracy and social inequalities” (127-144)

Internet:

- India’s India by Soutik Biswas (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/Modis_India)

The BBC’s coverage of the 2014 Indian elections
- Video- “Indian elections: Everything you need to know in two minutes” (2 minutes) (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26878181)
- India’s colorful Election slogans (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-27018561)

Optional Reading:
- Arundhati Roy, “Introduction: Democracy’s Failing Light” (from Listening to Grasshoppers: Field notes on Democracy) – 29 pgs-easy reading
- Baxi, “Indian democracy: a critique” (pp. 56-64 in Basrur bk)

Th., Nov. 5 - Religious Nationalism, Communalism & Gender

Required Reading:
Sengupta bk
- “Strongman: aspiration gets into politics” pp.113-142
- “Facebook girls: speaking up, testing democracy’s conscience” pp. 143-162

Moodle:

- Equality Labs Report on Facebook India (Facebook’s collusion with Hindu nationalism) - https://www.equalitylabs.org/facebookindiareport
- Sehgal, “Defending the Hindu nation: Militarism, Women’s Empowerment & the Hindu Right”

Documentary film: Father, Son & Holy War OR excerpts from Reason by Anand Patwardhan
Week 9

T., Nov. 10 – Neoliberalism, Globalization & Development

Required Reading:
From the Keywords bk:
- Globalization (pp.84-86)
- Neoliberalism (pp. 134-136)
- Development (pp.54-55) - skim

Required Readings: on Moodle
- Vandana Shiva, Globalization’s New Wars (excerpts)
- Assayag and Fuller, “Introduction” to Globalizing India: perspectives from below
- Vidal, “In search of Basmatisthan…”
- Assayag, “Seeds of Wrath”
- Roy - “Capitalism: a ghost story”, ch. 1 & 7 (re-read)

Documentary Film: Harvest of Hunger OR Rumble in Mumbai
Behind the label: India’s Genetically Modified Cotton (2011), 53:10 documentary film

Optional Readings:
  Chapter 2 “Connecting the Rich to the Poor” pp. 6-30
  Chapter 13 “Against Rolling back the State”, 233-275

Balachandran & Subramaniam, “On the history of globalization and India”
A. Bhaduri & D. Nayyar, the intelligent person’s guide to liberalization, Ch. 1, 2, 3
Vandana Shiva, “Bioterror and Biosafety” (in Terror-counter terrrror-women speak out)
Vandanan Shiva, “The Living Democracy Movement: Alternatives to the Bankruptcy of Globalization”
(in another world is possible)
Time Magazine articles on globalization in India
article on Ikea in Assayag bk

Th., Nov. 12 – Love, Desire, Sexuality & LGBTQ Movements

Required Readings:
- Vanita, “Thinking beyond gender in India”
- Vanita, “Love’s Rites: Same Sex Marriage in India and the West”
- Excerpts from book on Queer Activism in India
- Manyath, “The shameless marriage: thinking through same-sex erotics & the question of gay marriage in India”

Film: Sonali’s film –(in class if time permits or on reserve in the library)
Many People, Many Desires

Out in Mumbai:A victory for India’s LGBTQ community (2013), 52 mins.

Fire by Deepa Mehta (a feature film about two sisters-in-law in a Hindu joint family in Delhi who fall in love with each other)
Week 10
T, Nov. 17 – Last Day of Class
Required Readings:
Sengupta bk - Epilogue
DeVotta bk – Ch. 12 - Trends & Prospects
ER - Roy on Maoist Movements
ER – Introduction to Social Movements in India

Final Paper due during Exam Week
Links for Patwardhan Films (through the Gould library)

**In the Name of God [Ram Ke Naam]** (Anand Patwardhan, 1992)
https://carleton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=1d74bd14-7fbd-4be3-b701-ac3e01139036

**Jai Bhim, Comrade** (Anand Patwardhan, 2011)
https://carleton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=520a1699-fb8e-4623-9760-ac3e0104ad37

https://carleton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=7ffe0804-900f-4c97-8684-ac6100ebdc95

https://carleton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=cb32026-219c-4f44-964a-ac3e00ea031d

**War and Peace [Jang aur Aman]: Part 2** (Anand Patwardhan, 2002)
https://carleton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=fd7437f3-ab0c-4663-a251-ac3e00f3fc57

**Reason (Vivek)**, Anand Patwardhan, 2018. It is in two parts:

Part One:
https://carleton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=1c88786a-79aa-4915-af2b-ac55014b902f

Part Two:
https://carleton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=017e84e6-f619-4542-a4df-ac5600d7866d