

HISTORY 175A (Fall 2012)
Cultural and Political History of Contemporary South Asia
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12:15, Young CS 76

Instructor: Vinay Lal

Office: Bunche 5240

Office hrs: Tuesdays 1:30-3:30, and by appointment

Tel. no.: 310.825.8276; History Dept: 310.825.4601

e-mail: vlal@history.ucla.edu

Instructor's Web site: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia>

Course Web Site: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/12F/hist175a-1/>

South Asia, which comprises several countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, today constitutes the most populous region of the globe. The complexity of the region can be gauged by the fact that more than 1,000 languages are spoken in this part of the world; it is also home to the largest populations of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, and Parsis (Zoroastrians) in the world. India is often cited, and for good reasons, as an example of the possibilities of democracy in the Third World, however much the violence perpetrated by the Indian state, or the powerlessness of many of its most exploited and poor people, might put this reputation into serious question. The independence of India and the simultaneous birth of Pakistan in 1947 were accompanied by widespread violence; and the region remains extremely susceptible to violence, as the chronic unrest in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and repeated terrorist attacks in India, have so palpably demonstrated in recent months. In the 1980s, the Punjab, India's "granary", was rocked by violence as a secessionist movement took hold; since around 1990, violence has engulfed the northern Indian state of Kashmir. And one could go in this vein: secessionist movements and state violence aside, whether in India, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka, there continue to be various other ethnic, linguistic, and religious conflicts in this part of the world. Some of these conflicts have wide geopolitical ramifications: Pakistan has even acquired notoriety, justly or otherwise, as the principal sponsor of terrorism in the world, certainly as a country that is hospitable to Islamic extremists keen on waging war against infidels.

Violence has become, it is now transparent, a part of everyday life in South Asia. It can equally be argued that South Asia is not distinct in this respect, and that everywhere tolerance for violence has witnessed an alarming growth. And, yet, though South Asia might make the international news largely on account of religious or political conflict, the region – and especially India -- is also home to some of the most significant developments in contemporary life, from outsourcing and the growth of the novel in English to electoral democracy and a wide-ranging press. Political violence apart, other considerations also lead to the query: what does it mean to speak of India as a democracy? This course will not, however, be considering, except incidentally, the course of state formation, party politics in South Asian countries, or other questions that fall within the domain of a traditionally conceived political science and political history. Our history will be etched through certain thematic, political, and cultural issues. It is in this manner that South Asia will consequently begin to take shape, such that that seemingly inchoate mass might just begin to appear less exotic, less Other, less remote. Although the readings will focus on India, students are urged to remember that other South Asian countries face many similar problems and display many similar features of social and political formation.

The course will begin with the independence of India, the creation of Pakistan, and the assassination of Gandhi, followed by an overview of India since independence. This sets the stage for the introduction of ideas and concepts -- such as rights, identities, and modernity -- with which we shall be engaged through the greater part of this quarter. In week three, we shall focus on economic developments in India since 1947, and consider what measures the state has taken to eradicate poverty, increase income and productivity, and so on. In the name of 'development',

numerous groups of people were asked to sacrifice their modes of living for some greater good of which they were promised a part, and vast tracts of land were submerged to build what Jawaharlal Nehru called the 'new temples', namely dams, large industrial complexes, and the like. Over the last two decades, however, ecological movements, drawing inspiration from the teachings of Gandhi and other local leaders, and drawing on the strength of women and tribal people, have emerged to question the prerogatives that the state had assumed for itself. We will look at some of these struggles. We shall also engage in a discussion of movements which have brought the question of the rights and identity of minorities to the fore; as Gandhi said, "a democracy is to be judged by the manner in which it treats its minorities", and we shall look at how certain groups that are dispossessed or believe themselves to be dispossessed, whether constituted by ethnicity, race, religion, class, language, or degree of urbanization, have fared in the democratic process. Attention will be riveted, in our readings and/or lectures, on the untouchables or dalits in India, the Sikhs of the Punjab, and the 1990 agitation by the so-called 'backward castes' for a greater share of government jobs, college positions, and so forth. 'Communalism', or the construction of identities on religious lines to the exclusion of class and ethnicity, has been the bane of modern Indian political, public, and social life, and is said to be the antithesis of the ideal of secularism on which the future of India was staked after independence. We shall look at Hindu-Muslim 'communalism', as epitomized in the debate -- fought in the streets as much as in academia -- over the (now destroyed) Babri Masjid, though in my lectures I shall also say something of Hindu-Sikh communalism in recent years. How is history enlisted to the cause of the religious construction of identities? Here, as elsewhere, we shall proceed by way of a close study of one or two instances of a 'communal' conflict, rather than attempting a detailed and exhaustive narrative of 'communalism' in India.

We shall move from there to a discussion of the position of women in South Asia and particularly India, looking at a diverse and wide array of texts. The position of women in India and the rest of South Asia continues to remain a matter of much concern. South Asia is the only part of the globe, except for a few countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where males outnumber females; and science has, far from helping to rectify this imbalance, contributed to it as evidenced, for example, by the widespread use of amniocentesis tests (even when banned by state governments) to determine the sex of the foetus. In the 1990s, there was much agitation against sati, bride-burning, and other notorious instances of the abuse of women. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have all had women prime ministers for long stretches of time, and this fact has puzzled those who find it quite at odds with the general position of women in these society. In most feminist interpretations, "patriarchy" reconciles the seeming discrepancy. What have been the main concerns of Indian feminists? Among the less obvious questions that will emerge from our readings are: Does the degradation of women bear any relation to rapidly changing modes of economic life? What is their place in the public sphere? How do women exercise their autonomy, and what are the constraints upon them?

Questions about state-formation, the role of the middle-class in development, and the relationship of modernity to creation of identities are just as well comprehended by considering the politics of culture. In the last few weeks of the course, we will consider some aspects of modern Indian life, beginning with commercial Indian cinema, which is a unique cultural phenomenon of the twentieth century. The movie-hall and the film hoarding were surely among the most ubiquitous features of the Indian landscape, and "Bollywood" has an inescapable presence in Indian life. However, notwithstanding the advent of video and then satellite or cable television, which draw people into the home, India is inconceivable without its street life. Ubiquitous on Indian streets are the sacred cow, which is the natural speed-breaker of Indian roads, the black crow, the corner pan-shop, the tea stall, the roadside shrines, and the seemingly chaotic movements of vehicles on densely packed roads. Then there are those who ply their trade from street to street, be it the milkman, shoe mender (*mochi*), or the knife sharpener. Despite the rigidity with which people are held to their occupations, Indian society displays a remarkable fluidity. These and other features of Indian public spaces will provide us with the point of entry into a discussion of street life and public culture. The final week will be devoted to the contemplation of the troubled place of modernity in Indian life.

Modernity is scarcely an unqualified good; engagement with it, as developing nations are now finding out, can be a hazardous enterprise. Modernity has an intricate relationship to both bureaucratic management and the purported resolution of problems by the resort to 'technique', and to homogenization and globalization of culture. What kind of anxieties of influence pervade the Indian middle-class, and what is the place of India in world culture and politics? The course will end with some reflections along these lines.

Apart from introducing students to the political and cultural history of contemporary South Asia and particularly India, this course has been designed with the intention of fulfilling four other functions. First, as the diverse readings demonstrate, the course familiarizes students with a wide range of material, some of it is not so easily accessible. Students are encouraged to use the internet for access to a broad range of contemporary sources on contemporary Indian society, though it is hoped that students will also come to an awareness of the limitations of the internet. Though India is very much a print culture, in large parts of the country oral culture predominates, and illiteracy remains high (nearly 45%). Secondly, the range of material also introduces students to methods of historical inquiry and the craft of historiography. Thirdly, the selection of the material, and its present arrangement, is such as to facilitate analytical thinking. This should become apparent during the lectures. Finally, though my remarks here will be rather incidental, besides familiarizing students with the history of contemporary South Asia the course seeks to put into question certain aspects of American & world politics and culture that might have been taken for granted. What we think of as common sense is ideological, too.

REQUIREMENTS: You are, obviously, expected to attend class regularly. Only two unaccounted for class absences will be permitted. Please do the reading before class: the reading is approximately (on the average) 125-150 pages a week, most of it quite easy.

The formal requirements will be as follows: **one paper**, 5-6 pages long; will be due on the Tuesday of the sixth week (May 5). This paper should be on Aravind Adiga's book, *The White Tiger*. Do not write a book report; rather, furnish some analytical arguments. How does Adiga talk about poverty? What are the nature of his representations of middle-class India, urban life, provincial towns, Indian modernity, the working class, and so on? Secondly, **the final exam** will be of the take-home essay variety. You will be given six questions, divided into three groups of two questions each; everyone will answer both questions in group I, and from each of the other two groups you will answer one question. The total length of your exam should be about 10 pages, double-spaced. The exam will be given to you at the end of the last class (June 4), and it will be **due on Thursday of exam week, June 11**. The grade distribution will be as follows:

Short paper (5-6 pages)	35%
Final exam	65%

Class participation and attendance are critical and can affect your grade. If, for example, you are somewhere between a B+ and A- in the class, and you have made your presence felt by regular attendance/participation, you will get the benefit of the doubt.

COURSE MATERIALS: The books for this course have been placed on reserve in the college library. However, articles and papers that are available online will not be on reserve, as you can access them at will online. All files are in PDF and you merely have to follow the links in the syllabus. The following books, all required, have been ordered for your purchase at ASUCLA:

Arvind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (HarperCollins, 2008).

Vinay Lal, *Of Cricket, Guinness and Gandhi: Essays on Indian History and Culture* (paperback ed., Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005).

Aditya Nigam and Nivedita Menon, *Power and Contestation: India Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Picador, 2005).

N.B. You will find my comprehensive web site on South Asia (MANAS) of some use; material is added from time to time, so you are encouraged to look at the material there, which in some cases includes suggestions for reading, etc.

URL: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia>

You may also wish to consult my *South Asian Cultural Studies: A Bibliography* (Delhi: Manohar Books, 1996), two copies of which are in the main library, for references to matters pertaining to Indian politics, history, culture, cinema, etc.

The recommended readings are just that -- recommended. They may help you in formulating your ideas, in gaining a more substantive knowledge of the subject matter, and so on.

CALENDAR OF MEETINGS AND READINGS:

Part I: History, Politics, Economics: Some Principal Trajectories

Week 1 (March 31, April 2): Introduction to the Class; The Last Years of the Independence Struggle; Partition, Otherness, and the Advent of Modernity:

Ashis Nandy, "Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi", in *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture* (Delhi: Oxford, 1980).

Syed Hasan Manto, *Kingdom's End and Other Stories*, pp. 11-38 (Delhi: Penguin, 1987).

Paul Brass, *The Politics of India since Independence*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), pp. 1-28.

Recommended:

Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 414-454.

Week 2 (April 7, 9): India Since Independence: A Critical Overview

Aditya Nigam and Nivedita Menon, *Power and Contestation: India Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

Arundhati Roy, "The Greater Common Good": the complete essay is on the internet at:

<http://www.narmada.org/gcg/gcg.html>

Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, pp. 193-203.

Vinay Lal, "The Strange and Beguiling Relationship of Pakistan and India", *Amerasia Journal* 34, no. 1 (2008), pp. 99-111.

Week 3 (April 14, 16): 'Development' and the Economic 'Welfare' of Indians:

Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, pp. 204-50.

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 1-86 and 140-178.

P. Sainath, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* (Delhi: Penguin, 1996), pp. 231-70.

Start reading Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (2008).

Week 4 (April 21, 23): Politics and the Indian State

Ashis Nandy, "Culture, State and the Rediscovery of Indian Politics", in his *The Romance of the State and the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2003), pp. 15-33.

Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), pp. 15-60.

Vinay Lal, *Of Cricket, Guinness and Gandhi*, pp. 54-109.

Human Rights Watch, " 'We Have No Orders to Save You': State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat" (April 2002), on the internet at: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/india> [this reading will also be used for Week 5]

Part II: Rights, Identities, Communities: Spaces of Conflict, Agency, and Affirmation

Week 5 (April 28, 30): Communalism and Civil Society

Ashis Nandy, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhoomi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995), pp. 1-99.

Vinay Lal, "The Discourse of History and the Crisis at Ayodhya: Reflections on the Production of Knowledge, Freedom, and the Future of India", *Emergences*, nos. 5-6 (Fall 1994):4-44.

Week 6 (May 5, 7): Outcastes and Minorities: Voices of the Oppressed and Conflicts over Language, Ethnicity, and Religion

Brass, *Politics of India*, pp. 192-266.

Stanley Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 82-162.

S. Viswanathan, *Dalits in Dravidian Land: Frontline Reports on anti-dalit violence in Tamil Nadu (1995-2004)* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2005), pp. 101-97, 241-89. [Read any 20-30 pages of your choice.]

Anand Teltumbde, *Khairlanji: A Strange and Bitter Crop* (New Delhi: Navayana Publishing, 2008), pp. 1-59, 111-133, & 162-211. [You may omit pp. 162-211.]

Week 7 (May 12, 14): Women in South Asia: Private/Public; Domestic/Political

Amartya Sen, "More than 100 Million Women are Missing:", *New York Review of Books* (20 December 1990); online at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/3408>; see also the short exchange at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/3117>. And for more on the discussion, see <http://www.newint.org/issue240/facts.htm> AND <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/1991/18/18p12.htm>

Rehana Ghadially, *Women in Indian Society: A Reader* (New Delhi: Sage, 1988), pp. 178-95.

Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "Institutions, Beliefs, Ideologies", *Economic and Political Weekly* (27 April 1991):WS 2-18.

Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, *In Search of Answers: Women's Voices from Manusbi* (London: Zed Books; New Delhi: Horizon, 1991), pp. 94-103, 173-83.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "Beyond the Hysterectomies Scandal: Women, the Institution, Family, and State", in *The Violence of Normal Times: Essays on Women's Lived Realities*, ed. Kalpana Kannabiran (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2005), pp. 122-71.

Part III: Public Culture, Popular Cinema, and Other Aspects of Modernity

Week 8 (May 19, 21): The Hindi Film and Public Spaces: the Social Fabric of Indian Life

Ashis Nandy, "An Intelligent Critic's Guide to Indian Cinema", in Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud* (Delhi: Oxford, 1996), pp. 196-236.

Vinay Lal, "The Near Impossibility of the Outsider", and "Not This, Not That: The Hijras of India and the Cultural Politics of Sexuality", both in *Of Cricket, Guinness and Gandhi*, pp. 23-53, 178-203.

Arjun Appadurai, "Street Culture", *The India Magazine* 8, 1 (December 1987), pp. 2 ff.

Richard Cronin, "Indian Railways", *London Magazine* (1989).

Possible Reading: Vijay Mishra, "Decentering History: Some Versions of Bombay Cinema", *East-West Film Journal* 6, no. 1 (January 1992), pp. 111-155.

FILM: "Deewar" ("The Wall", 1975), starring Amitabh Bachchan & Praveen Babi; with English subtitles. The film can be streamed from any computer if you are registered for the course; go to the course webpage and follow the link at the end of the page. Please view the film before the class on Tuesday, May 19.

Week 9 (May 26, 28): Globalization, Modernity, and the Anxiety of Influence

Vandana Shiva, "War Against Nature and the People of the South", on the internet at:

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Globalization/War_Against_Nature_VFIS.html

Vinay Lal, *Of Cricket, Guinness and Gandhi*, pp. 1-22, 55-65.

Amartya Sen, *Argumentative Indian*, pp. 251-269.

Talking India: Ashis Nandy in conversation with Ramin Jahanbegloo (Delhi: Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 124-49.

Week 10 (June 2, 4) – Film Screenings: no lectures or reading this week, but you must come to class since you are responsible for material being screened in class

FILM (in class, June 2): “Lesser Humans”, 59 minutes; director, Stalin K [Special Mention, Amnesty International Film Festival, Amsterdam, 1998]

FILM (in class, June 4): “Seven Islands and a Metro”, 100 mins; director, Madhusree Dutta]