

**HISTORY 175A (Fall 2014)**  
**Cultural and Political History of Contemporary South Asia**  
**[on youTube as: India After Independence]**  
*Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:45*

Instructor: Vinay Lal, Professor of History

Office: Bunche 5240

Office Hrs: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:30-11:45 AM, and by appointment

Tel. no.: 310.825.8276; History Dept: 310.825.4601

e-mail: [vlal@history.ucla.edu](mailto:vlal@history.ucla.edu)

Instructor's India Website: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia>

Instructor's Personal Academic Site: <http://www.vinaylal.com>

Course Website: <https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/14F-HIST175A-1>

South Asia, which comprises several countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, is 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 world's largest populations of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, and Parsis (Zoroastrians). India is often cited, and not without reason, 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 assessment into serious question. Only a few months ago, India carried out, yet once again, the world's largest exercise in electoral democracy, as well over 600 million people from an electorate of some 800 million or more cast their ballots. 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, repeated terrorist attacks in India, and secessionist movements throughout the sub-continent, have so palpably demonstrated over the course of the last 10-20 years. 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. Sri Lanka went through a brutal civil war that lasted for decades. Some of these conflicts have wide geopolitical ramifications: Pakistan has even acquired notoriety, justly or otherwise, as one of the principal sponsors 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; indeed, the mention of violence is more likely to bring to mind the example of the Middle East. And, yet, though South Asia might make the international news largely on account of religious or political conflict, the region—and especially India—has also witnessed 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. Electoral democracy is, perhaps, a bland phrase, disguising as much as it reveals: in India, for instance, it encompasses the phenomenon of the Dalit vote, enabling a large section of the Indian underclass to exercise its political muscle and, in some ways, radically transform the political landscape. What does it mean, then, to speak of India as a democracy—and democracy for whom? 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; however, the histories of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have also diverged in significant respects.

The course will begin with the independence of India, the creation of Pakistan, the assassination of Mohandas Gandhi, and the promulgation, usually noted only by those with an interest in legal history, of the Constitution of India, 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, tackle inequality, 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. But, over the last two decades, 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 shall 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, caste, religion, class, language, or degree of urbanization, have fared in the democratic process. In our readings and lectures, we shall be focused on the untouchables or dalits in India, the Sikhs of the Punjab, and the 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 and in academia alike—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, though gender shall be one of the running themes in the course. 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 fetus. In the 1990s, there was much agitation against sati [widow immolation], 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 societies. 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 Indian 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 portion 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 have surely been among the most ubiquitous features of the Indian landscape, and “Bollywood” has an inescapable presence in Indian life. However, notwithstanding the advent of video, satellite, cable television, and now digital technologies and so-called social media, 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*), vegetable vendor (*sabziwallah*), 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. 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 several other functions. First, as the diverse readings demonstrate, the course familiarizes students with a wide range of material, some of which 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 (over 30%, according to government figures, though this is probably under-stated). 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 and world politics and culture that might have been taken for granted. What we think of as common sense—about our ‘own’ culture, for example—is ideological, too.

**REQUIREMENTS:** Students are, obviously, expected to attend class regularly. The reading for the entire week should be done by the Tuesday of that week, wherever possible: the reading is approximately (on the average) 150-175 pages a week, most of it very easy.

The formal requirements will be as follows: **one paper**, 5-6 pages long, double-spaced in Times New Roman 12, will be due on **Thursday, November 6th**. You will be given some prompts not later than the end of the third week. 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. You answer, in other words, four out of the six questions. The total length of your exam should be about 10 pages, double-spaced, in Times New Roman 12. The exam will be given to you at the end of the last class (December 11th), and it will be **due on Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>** at 2 PM. The grade distribution will be as follows:

Short paper (5-6 pages)	30%
Final exam	60%
Class participation, attendance	10%

Class attendance is not recorded; however, if you are taking part in class discussions, or you pose questions, I am aware of your presence. The 10% of the grade is at the instructor’s discretion—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:** With the exception of books that have been ordered for you, all the readings are available online; additionally, the books from which some of the readings have been drawn are placed on reserve in the college library. All files are in PDF and you merely have to follow the links in the syllabus, except where you are guided through a URL to an internet site. The following books are required and have been ordered for your purchase at ASUCLA:

Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (New York: Grove Press, 2006).

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions* (New Delhi: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2013).

Vinay Lal, *Deenavar: The Footpath, the City, and the Angry Young Man* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2010).

K. Satyanarayan and Susie Tharu, eds., *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing* (New Delhi: Navayana Publishing, 2013).

Aman Sethi, *A Free Man: A True Story of Life and Death in Delhi* (Delhi: Vintage, 2011).

**N.B.** You will find my comprehensive web site on South Asia (MANAS) of some use; the website has not been updated very much, but there is much material that is of use, and some bibliographies and other research tools as well: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia>

You can also access some of these articles on my blog: [www.vinaylal.wordpress.com](http://www.vinaylal.wordpress.com)

**Note:** This course was last offered in 2009 and 2012; the present version is substantially different, with many new readings. The 2009 lectures are now available in their entirety on YouTube, and you may find them of interest; however, please note that they are NOT a substitute for the lectures this year: not only are the readings quite different, but each time I teach the course my thoughts lead me to new subjects and different formulations. The lectures from 2009 can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLY3KRgc0HE8B8YI7S4z0kkIy5tcQJrnnD>

## CALENDAR OF MEETINGS AND READINGS:

**Week 0 (Thursday, Oct 2):** Introduction to the Class; colonial rule in India and the end of the British Raj.

**Week 1 (Tue, Oct 7 & Thurs, Oct 9)** The Last Years of the Independence Struggle; The Partition of India, Gandhi's Assassination, & the Advent of the Nation-State:

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

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

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), pp. 70-98.

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

**Week 2 (Tue, Oct 14 & Thurs, Oct 16):** India Since Independence: A Critical Overview

Wendy Singer, *Independent India, 1947-2000* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2012), pp. 1-42.

Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), pp. 193-219.

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2013), pp. 17-80.

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

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

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

**Week 3 (Tue, Oct 21 & Thurs, Oct 23):** 'Development' and Economic Well-being:

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory*, pp. 107-242.

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

Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam, *Power and Contestation: India Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2007), pp. 61-82.

Gardiner Harris, "Poor Sanitation in India May Afflict Well-Fed Children with Malnutrition", *New York Times* (13 July 2014), p. A1, online at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/15/world/asia/poor-sanitation-in-india-may-afflict-well-fed-children-with-malnutrition.html? r=0> [NB: We shall analyze this article to see what are also

some of the acute problems in representing India]

**Week 4 (Tue, Oct 28 & Thurs, Oct 30):** 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]

**Week 5 (Tue, Nov 4 & Thurs, Nov 6):** Communalism, Civil Society, and Identity

Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, pp. 150-195.

Vinay Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (Oxford, 2002; new rev. ed., 2005), pp. 141-185.

Stanley Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 101-162.

Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* [A Novel] (New York: Grove Press, 2006). Start reading this novel and finish it before the end of the quarter.

**Week 6 (Thurs, Nov 13):** Voices of the Oppressed: Dalit Writing, History, and Politics

*Please note that Tue, Nov 11, is Veteran's Day and a holiday.*

K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, eds., *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2013), read the introduction and at least 2 of the 4 modules.

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.]**

Kancha Ilaiah, *Post-Hindu India: A Discourse on Dalit-Babujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution* (New Delhi: Sage Publishers, 2009), pp. 232-66.

**Week 7 (Tue, Nov 18 & Thurs, Nov 20):** Work and Life in the City

Aman Sethi, *A Free Man: A True Story of Life and Death in Delhi* (Delhi: Vintage Books, 2012), complete.

**Week 8 (Tue, Nov 25; no class on Thurs, Nov 27--Thanksgiving Holiday)** Women in South Asia: Private/Public; Domestic/Political; Home/World

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>

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

Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*, pp. 140-78.

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.

Wendy Singer, *Independent India*, pp. 105-27.

**Week 9 (Tue, Dec 2 and Thurs, Dec 4)** The Hindi Film and City Spaces: the Social Fabric of Indian Life

**FILM:** "Deewaar" ("The Wall", 1975, director: Yash Chopra), starring Amitabh Bachchan & Praveen Babi; with English subtitles. The film can be streamed from any computer on campus if you are registered for the course; go to the course webpage and follow the link at the end of the page. You may be able to view it at your home, but the quality may be poor. The film will also be on reserve in the Media Library, Powell 70. Please view the film before you come to class.

Vinay Lal, *Deewaar: The Footpath, the City, and the Angry Young Man* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2011), complete.

Arjun Appadurai, "Street Culture" (1987), reprinted in Vinay Lal, *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern Indian City: The City in Its Plenitude* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 297-306.

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

Lakshmi Srinivas, "Cinema in the City: Tangible Forms, Transformations and the Punctuation of Everyday Life", *Visual Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (2010), pp. 1-12.

**Week 10 (Tue, Dec 9 and Thurs, Dec 11):** Globalization, Modernity, the Anxiety of Influence, and Reflections on India's Future

S. Abid Hussain, *The National Culture of India* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1978), pp. 143-75.

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](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Globalization/War_Against_Nature_VFIS.html)

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

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

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

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**Further Reading and Short Bibliography (of a handful of recent books):**

Boo, Katharine. *Behind the Beautiful Forever: Life, Death and Hope in a Bombay Undercity*. New York: Random House, 2012.

Deb, Siddhartha. *The Beautiful and the Damned: A Portrait of the New India*. Faber & Faber, 2011.

French, Patrick. *India: A Portrait*. New York: Knopf, 2011.

Giridharadas, Anand. *India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation's Remaking*. New York: Riverhead Trade, 2012.

Guha, Ramachandra. *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. New York and New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2008.

Kapur, Akash. *India Becoming: A Portrait of Life in Modern India*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2012.

Luce, Edward. *In Spite of the Gods: The Rise of Modern India*. New York: Anchor, 2008.

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

Roy, Arundhati. *Walking with the Comrades*. New York: Penguin, 2011.

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

**Films:**

We may be viewing short excerpts from these films in class:

"Lesser Humans", 59 minutes; director, Stalin K [Special Mention, Amnesty International Film Festival, Amsterdam, 1998]

"Seven Islands and a Metro" (2006), 100 mins; director, Madhusree Dutta

“Gandhi Lives” (2012), director: Aruna HarPrasad

“Dreams of a Six-Figure Salary” (2010), director: Aruna HarPrasad