

Introduction to Indian Civilization



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Asian Languages and Civilizations

Course Description

This course is designed as a broad introduction to the people, history, religion, politics, culture, art, music, and cinema of India – in short, to the *civilization* of India. India is the largest democracy in the world, an emerging global economic power, and home to the second largest population in the world (at more than one billion, Indians account for almost 17% of the world's population) within its borders. Outside its borders lives a huge and influential Indian diasporic population (spread across the U.K., North America, the Caribbean, and Eastern and Southern Africa) and the cultural influence of Indian art, music, cinema (Bollywood), and spiritual practice continues to grow ever stronger. India has one of the longest recorded histories in the world, and is also one of the most diverse countries in the world, being home to substantial populations of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Jains (among others) and more than 1,600 languages and dialects!

This course therefore cannot hope to provide a comprehensive study of all things Indian, but rather is organized around several of the most significant thematic topics that arguably form the “core” of Indian civilization: Hinduism, Islam, Partition (also the Independence of both India and Pakistan from English colonization), caste, gender, and class. In organizing these topics thematically, this is a class that will not necessarily move chronologically. Rather, we will consider these basic elements of Indian civilization in more comprehensive focus –

considering each in a range of temporal and historical contexts. We will rely on literature and film as our primary modes of entry into this study of civilization, but also contextualize these readings with selections from historical, anthropological, and sociological studies of various aspects of Indian society and culture.

Materials

RK Narayan, *The Ramayana*

John Stratton Hawley and Mark Jurgensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India*

Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar, *The Indians: Portrait of a People*

Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India*

Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

Bama, *Harum-Scarum Saar and Other Stories*

Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger*

Schedule of Classes

Week One

Jan. 13 welcome!

Jan. 15 Introducing India

- Mira Kamdar, Planet India: ch. 1 "Life on Planet India" (p. 1-23) and "As Goes India, So Goes the World" (p. 281-286)

- Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar, The Indians: "Introduction" and "The Hierarchical Man" (p. 1-24)

CLASSICAL HINDUISM

Week Two

Jan. 20 **MAP QUIZ**

- The *Ramayana*, Chapters 1-4

Jan. 22 - Finish *The Ramayana*

Week Three

Jan. 27 - A.K. Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation" (p.22-49) in *Many Ramayanas*, ed. by Paula Richman (University of California Press, 1991)

Jan. 29 Watch in class: *Ramayana* TV serial episode (1989)

- Philip Lutgendorf (1990). "Ramayan: The Video." *The Drama Review* 34, p. 127-176

Week Four

Feb. 3 - Kakar and Kakar: "Religious and Spiritual Life" (p. 134-151)

- Hawley and Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India*: Introduction – ch. 3 (p. 3-90)

Feb. 5 - Finish *Songs of the Saints of India*

ISLAM IN INDIA

Week Five

- Feb. 10 - Annemarie Schimmel, *Empire of the Great Mughals*: ch. 1 “Historical Introduction” and “At Court” (p. 21-81)
- Feb. 12 - Annemarie Schimmel, *Empire of the Great Mughals*: ch. 8 “Languages and Literature” (p. 239-262)
- Amir Khusro, Ghalib, etc. (readings TBA)

Film screening: *Mughal-e-Azam* (K. Asif, 1960)

Week Six

- Feb. 17 *film discussion*
- Feb. 19 Re-imagining Akbar (watch in class: scenes from *Jodhaa Akbar*, 2008)

PARTITION

Week Seven

- Feb. 24 - Urvashi Butalia, excerpt from *The Other Side of Silence* (Duke University Press, 2000)
- Sa’adat Hasan Manto, “Toba Tek Singh”
- Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India* (ch. 1-6)
- Feb. 26 - *Cracking India* (ch. 7-19)

Week Eight

- March 3 - finish *Cracking India*

Film Screening: *Earth* (Deepa Mehta, 1998)

- March 5 *film discussion*

CASTE

Week Nine

- March 10 - Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (ch. 1-4)
- March 12 - *The God of Small Things* (c. 5-11)

Week Ten

- March 17 - Finish *The God of Small Things*
- March 19 - Kakar and Kakar: “The Inner Experience of Caste” (p. 25-40)
- Bama, *Harum Scarum Saar* (entire)

SPRING BREAK!

POLITICS AND PERFORMANCE OF GENDER

Week Eleven

- March 31 - Kakar and Kakar: “Indian Women: Traditional and Modern”

(p. 41-70)
- Gita Hariharan, "The Remains of the Feast"

Film Screening: *Monsoon Wedding*

April 2 *film discussion*

Week Twelve

April 7 - Kakar and Kakar: "Sexuality" (p. 71-106)
- The *Kama Sutra* of Vatsyayana (trans. Wendy Doniger with Sudhir Kakar): "Introduction The Text" (p. xi-xxxix) and other excerpts TBA

April 9 - Carla Petievich, *When Men Speak as Women: Vocal Masquerade in Indo-Muslim Poetry*: "Introduction" (p. 1-32) and "Rekhti Poems" (p. 271-354)

Week Thirteen

April 14 - "'Go Suck Your Husband's Sugarcane!' Hijras and the Use of Sexual Insult" by Kira Hall in Livia and Hall (eds.) *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 430-460.

Film Screening: *Fire*

April 16 *film discussion*
- Ratna Kapur, "Too Hot to Handle: The Cultural Politics of *Fire*." *Feminist Review* 64 (Spring 2000) p. 53-64.

CONDUNDRUMS OF CLASS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Week Fourteen

April 21 - Edward Luce, "Global and Medieval: India's Schizophrenic Economy" in *In Spite of the Gods* (p. 23-62)
- Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger*

April 23 - *The White Tiger*

Week Fifteen

April 28 - Finish *The White Tiger*

Film Screening: *Slumdog Millionaire*

April 30 *film discussion, wrap-up*
- Kakar and Kakar: "The Indian Mind" (p. 180-203)

FINAL EXAM