ANTH 12.7/AMES 42.4

IMAGINING INDIA: HOW TO WRITE ABOUT SOUTH ASIAN CULTURE

Spring 2014
Classroom: Carson C214
MWF 10:00–11:05
Dist: SOC; WCult: NW

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Course Description

What sort of people live in South Asia? Spiritual, irrational, modern? What sort of people are the anthropologists who tell us? Spies, Gandhian activists, hippies?

This course will investigate how knowledge about India and Sri Lanka has been produced through ethnography, or “writing culture.” It is about how we (as anthropology students) should interpret that knowledge and the people who are represented. This is an introductory level course, but the emphasis in the classroom will be on seminar-style discussion, and the density of the texts we consider will reward close readings along the lines of what you would expect to do in a literature class. In other words, ANTH 12.7/AMES 42.4 is designed as much to be a guide to reading different kinds of texts and relating them to each other as it is an exposition of lifeways “on the ground” in South Asia.

There are five complete books on the reading list. Although representative of intellectual attitudes and historical moments within the study of the subcontinent, none is a conventional ethnographic monograph. These are writerly projects and they invite attention, in different ways, to the work that ethnographers do with words. We will read Kipling’s Kim—the great novel of the British Raj—not only as an influential (and problematic) source of representations of Indian society, but also as a narrative of characters who are involved in the pursuit of ethnographic research. Guha’s Savaging the Civilized is an intellectual biography of Verrier Elwin, an English missionary who remade himself twice—first as an anthropologist and then ultimately as an Indian. The Remembered Village is a landmark work that began as every ethnographer’s nightmare—Srinivas lost all his fieldnotes and then resolved to reconstruct his study from memory. Kumar’s Friends, Brothers, and Countrymen is both a fine example of fieldwork memoir and a variation on the genre, in that the field site she writes about is closer to home than for most. Finally, as a collaborative effort in which the roles of author and informant intertwine, Kantowski’s compact An Indian Village through Letters and Pictures gestures in the direction of self-ethnography.

Along with these books the course materials also include several documentary and feature films. Together these texts introduce a series of questions that have shaped the course of scholarly inquiry into the workings of South Asian societies. They follow a broadly historical trajectory from the heyday of British colonialism to two contemporary
sites at which diverse ethnographic voices have been brought together in conversation. One of these sites is a place—the North Indian city of Banaras, or Varanasi. The other is an event—the civil war that has come to an uneasy conclusion on the island of Sri Lanka.

**Course Goals and Learning Objectives**

This course will encourage you to develop and express your ideas in more than one way. A typical class will proceed according to the following format: student presentation, informal lecture, class discussion.

A brief student presentation designed to illustrate the day’s topic will inaugurate most class sessions. This assignment will take the form of a) one or more visuals and b) some basic contextual information. The presenter will then engage a round of questions from the instructor and fellow student about the material’s connection to the assigned reading—and, in the spirit of the class, the information’s claim to facticity.

The class discussion segment will encourage students to communicate ideas dynamically and verbally. Many of our discussions will center on questions of cultural difference—on getting inside perspectives on collective and individual identity that should provoke you to examine the author’s notions of society and self—and move onto your own.

The main assignments are a midterm exam and a final paper. They emphasize research and writing skills in different ways. The exam will be designed to encourage close reading (and attentive review) of one of the representative works of ethnographic writing we will have discussed in class. The final assignment will involve you in library research on a topic of interest to you and relevance to themes discussed in the course; you will organize and present your work in the form of a thesis-driven long essay.

**Prerequisites:** There are no formal course prerequisites for ANTH 12.7AMES 42.4, which is an introductory level class. If you enter with some prior knowledge of the religion, history, or politics of South Asia—through personal experience, academic study, or both—the information and insights you offer will be a valuable resource. But when you contribute, take care to do so in such a way that opens up discussion for the whole classroom community. And if you enroll with little preparation, look to careful reading of the assigned material to get you up to snuff in the opening weeks, and participate with confidence.

Note that among the assigned texts are three Hindi-language mass-market (“Bollywood”) films. These are examples of popular cinema, produced as crowd-pleasers. Attend the screenings expecting to enjoy yourselves, but also prepared to take notes over a period of up to three hours. You will be required to write a short essay on the film of your choice.

**Required Books and Films**

Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals, and India*
Detlef Kantowsky, *An Indian Village Through Letters and Pictures*

Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (introduction by Edward Said)

Nita Kumar, *Friends, Brothers, and Informants: Fieldwork Memoirs of Banaras*

M. N. Srinivas, *The Remembered Village*

*Textbooks may be purchased at Wheelock Books. Note that the syllabus incorporates numerous reading assignments taken from sources outside of these books. You will be able to access these readings online through Canvas."

Chintu Ji (dir. Ranjit Kapoor, 2009)

Forest of Bliss (dir. Robert Gardner, 1985)

Jagte Raho (dir. Amit Maitra, 1956)

Mrityu Dand (dir. Prakash Jha, 1997)

Song of Ceylon (dir. Basil Wright, 1934)

*It is highly recommended that you view the films together with your classmates at the screenings scheduled for Sunday evenings. Films will also be made accessible through the library’s reserves and streaming services.*

Course Requirements

1. **Class Participation:** 20%
2. **Presentation:** 10%
3. **Midterm Exam:** 25%
4. **Film Essay, 5 pp.:** 15%
5. **Final Project, 10+ pp.:** 30%

Classroom Policies

1. **Attendance:** Attendance in class is mandatory. If you find you are unable to attend on a particular day, tell me *before* you miss class, preferably through e-mail. Note that attendance is part of your class participation grade and that more than two unexcused absences will put that grade at risk.

2. **Cell phones:** Off. Checking your phone for messages, etc. while class is in session is a mark of disrespect to me, your classmates, and the College and—outside of an emergency context—will incur mockery from me or worse.
3. **Food and drink:** No eating in the classroom. Liquids are fine. If it were up to me you could smoke in class too, but if you took me up on that I suspect we could both get in hot water with the College.

*If you require a personal exemption from any of these rules, talk to me or e-mail me about it.*

4. **A general principle concerning the syllabus:** Read the whole syllabus. No, really. Like today.

5. **Another general principle concerning the syllabus:** The syllabus is subject to change through the course of the term. As your instructor, I may revise or augment what’s on the menu for any given day through the end of the term.

6. **A general principle concerning class discussion:** The classroom is a community, and class discussion is a collective project. When you contribute, be aware that your audience is a roomful of comparably well-informed interlocutors. Don’t be shy (I will try to encourage you), and keep in mind this basic point: *It’s not about me; it’s about the ideas—and contributing to a dynamic and collective discussion about them.*

7. **Please turn in all written assignments to me** (or my office mailbox) on **paper**, unless otherwise specified. It’s up to you to print it out in time, not up to me.

8. **Late assignment policy:** Note that the due dates for the two biggest assignments are fixed. *The midterm exam is due at 5:00 on Tuesday, 22 April.* Midterms turned in after the 5:00 mark will incur a three-point penalty for every day they are late. I will announce the prompts to all of you at the same time and so fairness requires that you have the same amount of time to complete the assignment. *The final paper is due at 5:00 on 3 June, which is the Dartmouth College deadline.* As far as the other assignments (and emergencies) are concerned, there’s one cardinal rule: Don’t be a stranger. I promise to be accessible, by e-mail and in person before and after class and at the office. If you need help with the assignments—whether your concerns are time-related, text-related, or anything else—consider me your first stop.

9. **Punctuality, yours and mine:** I will do my best to start class on time, and I really don’t like to deprive latecomers of important information, so I hope you also do your best to arrive on time. I confess to the bad habit of allowing class discussions to run overtime. Consider yourself notified: Class ends at 11:05 sharp. If we’re still talking, you may choose to stick around in the classroom out of interest or courtesy, but you are under no obligation to do so.

10. **My attitude towards grading:** Do the reading for each class and make informed contributions to class discussion when you see an opening. If you follow these two baseline principles, you’ll be well on the way to succeeding in this course.
A straight-A project for me is one that exhibits excellence, and generally speaking there are two ways to do that. The first is to produce work that is letter perfect. In the case of a paper, that means the argument is tight and it discusses the material at a level of sophistication that demonstrates mastery. The second way is to take an intellectual risk—and for that risk to pay off. As a teacher, I’m never more pleased than when I recognize work from a student that surprises me and teaches me something new.

A grade in the C range or lower generally indicates that something is wrong. I don’t give out many Cs, and when I do I am sure to identify the problem. I do recognize that some students may make the call to turn in C-grade work in my class because they have placed their priorities elsewhere, and that is a decision I can respect on a personal level. In other words, no foul—so long as you’re a) in control of the situation; and b) not under the illusion that you’re entitled to a good grade for something you didn’t work hard on.

**Academic Honesty Policy**


**Student Needs**

Students with disabilities enrolled in this course and who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me before the end of the first week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Accessibility Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

Student Accessibility Services: [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/facstaff/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/facstaff/).

**Additional Support for your Learning**

Academic Skills Center: [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/).

Course Schedule

week 1—Introductions

Mar. 24 (M)
*introductions of: members of the class; the general scheme of the class; its goals and standards. Where is South Asia? What distinguishes it as a unity? Culturally? Geographically? Historically? Narratively?*

26 (W)
lecture: Overview of South Asia’s Diversity

28 (F)
*introduce map exercise*

week 2—The Great Game

31 (M)
*reading*: Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (first part)
*map exercise due*

Apr. 2 (W)
*reading*: Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (second part)

4 (F)
*readings*: Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (last part); Gyanendra Pandey, “The Bigoted Julaha”
*introduce class discussion exercise on district gazetteers*

week 3—Tropical Wilderness

7 (M)
*reading*: Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized* (first part)
*class discussion exercise on district gazetteers*

9 (W)
*reading*: Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized* (second part)
*assign midterm essay*

11 (F)
*reading*: Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized* (last part)
in-class screening: *Song of Ceylon* (dir. Basil Wright, 1934)

**week 4—The Village Remembered**

13 (Sun)
*screening (7:00, room TBA): Mrityu Dand* (dir. Prakash Jha, 1997)

14 (M)
*reading: Joseph Alter, “A Hybrid History of Encounter”*

16 (W)
*reading: M. N. Srinivas, The Remembered Village* (first part)

18 (F)
*readings: M. N. Srinivas, The Remembered Village* (second part)

**week 5—From Civilization to Nation**

20 (Sun)
*screening (7:00, room TBA): Forest of Bliss* (dir. Robert Gardner, 1985)

21 (M)
*reading: Forest of Bliss criticism, TBA*

22 (Tue)
**Midterm Essay Due: 5:00 IN MY MAILBOX, ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT**

23 (W)

25 (F)

**week 6—The State and the City**

27 (Sun)
*screening (7:00, room TBA): Jagte Raho* (dir. Amit Maitra, 1956)

28 (M)
*reading: Nikhil Anand, “Pressure: The PoliTechnics of Water Supply in Mumbai”*
in-class screenings: *Ek Dozen Paani* (on Vimeo); *Bombay, Our City* (dir. Anand Patwardhan, selections)

30 (W)
readings: Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, “Public Modernity in India”; Ashis Nandy, *from The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism*

May 2 (F)

week 7—The Village Revisited

5 (M)
readings: Detlef Kantowski, *An Indian Village Through Letters and Pictures* (first part)

7 (W)
readings: Detlef Kantowski, *An Indian Village Through Letters and Pictures* (second part); Akhil Gupta, *from Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*
discuss film essay

9 (F)
reading: Nita Kumar, *Friends, Brothers, and Informants* (first part)

week 8—Writing Place: Banaras

11 (Sun)
screening (7:00, room TBA): *Chintu Ji* (dir. Rajeev Kapoor 2009)

12 (M)
reading: Nita Kumar, *Friends, Brothers, and Informants* (second part)
discuss final paper
assign tourism discussion exercise

14 (W)
readings: Nita Kumar, *Friends, Brothers, and Informants* (last part); Richard Schechner and Linda Hess, *from The Ramlila of Ramnagar*
film essay due

16 (F)
readings: Lawrence Cohen, *from No Aging in India*; Jennifer Huberman, “Deciphering the Object of Consumption among Tourists in Banaras”
tourism discussion exercise
assign journalism discussion exercise

week 9—Writing Event: Civil War in Sri Lanka

19 (M)

journalism discussion exercise

21 (W)
readings: Caitrin Lynch, from Juki Girls, Good Girls; Sharika Thiranagama, from In My Mother’s House: Civil War in Sri Lanka

23 (F)
readings: Margaret Trawick, from Enemy Lines: Warfare, Childhood, and Play in Batticaloa; M.I.A., “Paper Planes”

week 10—Wrapup and Review

28 (W)
review session

June 3 (Tu)
Final Paper Due: 5:00 IN MY MAILBOX, ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT