Religion, Community, and Conflict in South Asia

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Course Description

Why does religion so often become a source of conflict in society? How can doctrines that emphasize harmony and peace become the justification for rioting, war, and terrorism? Why is conversion from one religion so controversial? What should be the proper role of religion in public life and in politics? This course approaches these questions in the cultural context of South Asia, drawing examples from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Nepal. Topics include the place of religious ideas and practices in defining social identity and shaping actual communities, and roles of religion in politics. These examples serve as a running comparison with similar issues confronting contemporary America.

Course Requirements

Students should carefully read and reflect on the assignments for each class, and be prepared to talk about them. Formal work for the course will be: a 5-page take-home midterm essay question (25%); a 15-page term paper (50%) [Please click here for general advice on paper writing.]; and two presentations in class (one of
which will concern the topic of the term paper) (together, 25%). Participation in class discussions can raise (and lack thereof may lower) the final grade. The aim is for the students to develop good analytical and expressive skills while exploring the subject.

**Books for Purchase**

Octavio Paz, *In Light of India*

Stephen Hay, ed. *Sources of Indian Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (SIT 2)

Vasudha Dalmia and H. von Stietencron, eds., *Representing Hinduism* (RH)

Ainslie T. Embree, *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India*

Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*

Stanley Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*

Course Reader (CR)

Recommended:

Francis Robinson, ed., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives* [Will be used as a core background source, abbr. CEI below]

**Schedule of Readings**

**Week I: Overview**

Octavio Paz, *In Light of India*, pp. 3-133.

**Religion and Society in Premodern South Asia**

**Week II: Caste Order and Other Visions of the "Noble" Society**

Tu  CEI, 39-77; Gombrich, pp. 1-81.
CR: RV 10.90, BAU 1.4, Laws of Manu 2
Gita Dharampal-Frick, "Shifting Categories in the Discourse on Caste," in RH.

Th CEI, 77-93; Gombrich, pp. 81-136.
CR: Edicts of Ashoka; Manu; Ramayana

**Week III: Hindus and Muslims / Hindutva (Hindu-ness) as Identity**

Tu  CEI, 93-147.

Th N. K. Wagle, "Hindu-Muslim Interactions in Medieval Maharashtra," in HR.
SIT 2, pp. 243-296 (Gandhi, Tagore, Savarkar).

**Religion and Society in Modern South Asia**

**Week IV: Indian Muslim or Muslim Indian?**

Tu  SIT, vol. 2, ch. 5.
   J. Alam, "Composite Culture and Communal Consciousness: The Ittehadud Muslimeen in Hyderabad," in RH.
**Week V: Religious Definitions of Social Identity**

**Tu**  
SIT, vol. 1, ch. 16.  
Tambiah, ch. 5: "Sikh Identity, Separation and Ethnic Conflict"

**Th**  
SIT 2, pp. 324-348 (B. R. Ambedkar and Conversion to Buddhism for Untouchables).  

**Week VI: What is Hinduism? / Confrontation with Christianity**

**Tu**  
CEI, 155-158, 229-231  
Robert E. Frykenberg, "The Emergence of Modern 'Hinduism' as a Concept and as an Institution," in RH.  
Richard Burghart, "The Category 'Hindu' in the Political Discourse of Nepal" in RH.

**Th**  
Ram Bapat, "Pandita Ramabai," in RH.  

**Week VII: Religious Revival and Reform, and Nationalism**

**Tu**  
Embree, ch. 1: "Religion, Nationalism, and Conflict."  
Embree, ch. 2: "The Question of Hindu Tolerance."  
Embree, ch. 3: "The Politics of Religion in Contemporary India."

**Th**  
Anncharlott Eschmann, "Religion, Reaction and Change: The Role of Sects in Hinduism," in HR.  

**Week VIII: Language, Ritual, and the Media / The Uses of History**

**Tu**  
Embree, ch. 4: "Religious Pluralism, National Integration, and Scholarship"  
Tambiah, ch. 9: "Hindu Nationalism, the Ayodhya Campaign, and the Babri Masjid"

**Th**  
Partha Chatterjee, "History and the Nationalization of Hinduism" in RH, pp. 103-128.  

**Week IX: Religious Status and the Law**
Tu  CR: Marc Galanter, "Hinduism, Secularism, and the Indian Judiciary," ch. 10 in Law and Society in Modern India.

Dieter Conrad, "The Personal Law Question and Hindu Nationalism," in RH.


**Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Sri Lanka**

**Week X: The Monks' History of Ceylon**

Tu  CEI, 147-155; 222-228.

Gombrich, chs. 6-8.

**Week XI: Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka**

Tu  Tambiah, ch. 3: "The 1915 Sinhala Buddhist-Muslim Riots in Ceylon."

Th  Tambiah, ch. 4: "Riots in Sri Lanka."

**The Dynamics of Religious and Ethnic Violence**

**Week XII: Religion, Politics, and Collective Violence**

Tu  Tambiah, ch. 7: "Some General Features of Ethnic Riots and Riot Crowds"

Tambiah, ch. 8: "The Routinization and Ritualization of Violence"

Tambiah, ch. 10: "Entering a Dark Continent: The Political Psychology of Crowds"

Th  Tambiah, ch. 11: "Reconfiguring Le Bon and Durkheim on Crowds as Collectives"

Tambiah, ch. 12: "The Moral Economy of Collective Violence"

**Seed Bibliography for Research Papers**

**Critical Perspectives on Nationalism**


van der Veer, Peter. 1994. Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India. Berkeley: University of
**Religious and Ethnic Identities, Political Action, and Communalism**

Ludden, David, ed. 1996. *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*. Philadelphia:

  Univ. of Penn. Press; pub'd in India as: *Making India Hindu* (Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press).


  Vistar Publications.


  Oxford University Press.


  Chicago Press.


**Ethnicity and Race in South Asia**


Bronkhorst, Johannes, and Madhav M. Deshpande, eds. 1999. *Aryan and Non-Aryan in South Asia: Evidence, Interpretation

  and Ideology*. Harvard Oriental Series, Opera Minora, vol. 3. Cambridge, Mass.: Dept. of Sanskrit and Indian Studies,

  Harvard University.

**Indian Law**


**Revival and Reform Movements / Defining and Redefining the 'Hindu'**


  Press.


Albany: SUNY Press.

**Sikhism**


**South Asian Muslims**

Iqbal, Sir Muhammad. 1934. The Reconstruction of Religious Thought is Islam. London. [A modernist statement of the meaning of being a Muslim by a leading intellectual of colonial India.]
Minault, Gail. 1982. The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India. New York: Columbia Univ. Press. [Examines an important, Indian Islamic movement of the early 1920s that supported and looked for inspiration to the Turkish sultanate up until its destruction by the British.]

**Forms of Religious Practice and Authority in Hindu Traditions**


<More to come>

**Conversion, Religious Mission, and Counter-Mission**

The Kashmir Dispute

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<tr>
<th>Kashmir as Disputed Territory</th>
<th>A New Beginning In South Asia</th>
<th>US President Clinton's visit to India</th>
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<td>An annotated list of web sites related to the Kashmir dispute</td>
<td>A policy briefing issued by the Brookings Institution on South Asia</td>
<td>A briefing by the Indian Embassy on the occasion of Pres.Clinton's visit.</td>
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South Asia Citizen's Web

"The South Asia Citizen's Web is an independent space on the net to promote dialogue and information exchange between and about South Asian citizens initiatives. The main rubrics on this site are - Civil Society, Peace, Democracy, Secularism, social movements, the women's movement, Environmental Campaigns, labour movement activism, human rights groups and campaigns, citizens action against communalism and religious fundamentalism, news, films, journals contents pages, research projects and book catalogues."

[ Dr. Lubin's Homepage ]  [ Dr. Lubin's Course List ]  [ Religion Course List ]