

PSC 3192W: Politics of South Asia Through Literature and Film

Seminar:	Monday 12:45 – 2:35 p.m. Online (Synchronous)	Emmanuel J. Teitelbaum Associate Professor Department of Political Science Hall of Government Room 411
Office Hours:	Wednesday, 1:00-3:00 p.m.; please schedule an appointment on my Calendly page	Phone: (202) 994-9125 Email: ejt@gwu.edu

South Asia is home to approximately one-quarter of the world's population (about 1.8 billion people). The social, political, and economic landscape of the region is highly diverse. Many South Asians have enjoyed the freedoms associated with political democracy while others have suffered under brutal dictatorships. Some enjoy peace and stability while others experience persistent communal strife. In some places, women are treated with greater respect and dignity whereas many feature heavily patriarchal cultures and norms. Some in South Asia prosper in relatively egalitarian societies while others endure grinding poverty, inequality, and deprivation.

This course will explore South Asia's breathtaking political, social and economic variation through literature and film. A primary aim is to harness the insights from the realm of art to illuminate academic and policy debates. How do South Asian novels and films enhance our understanding of the legacies of colonialism, the causes of communal strife, potential solutions to endemic poverty, or the consequences of gender bias or social and economic inequality? Students will learn to develop arguments to explain variation by comparing, contrasting and synthesizing competing social scientific perspectives and to support their arguments with details from textual and visual materials. Through this exploration, students will develop a working familiarity with South Asian politics and society as well as a deeper appreciation for the unique ability of literature and film to illuminate the region's enduring challenges.

Course Objectives

- Develop a deeper understanding of how people in South Asia experience inequality and injustice through literature and film
- Critically reflect upon the role of literature and film as a tool for political and social reform
- Identify the primary effects of India's partition on contemporary politics in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan
- Explain why some countries and regions in South Asia are more democratic than others
- Formulate a theory for the prevalence of gender inequality and violence against women in South Asia
- Compose an argumentative essay through an iterative process (starting with an abstract then progressing to an outline, first draft and final paper draft)
- Critically monitor and evaluate the quality of your own writing

Course Requirements

- 1) Four short reviews (including at least one novel)—20%
- 2) Class presentation—10%
- 3) Blog posts—10%
- 4) Class participation—10%

- 5) Final paper—50%
- Short summary = 5%
 - Comprehensive outline = 10%
 - First draft = 10%
 - Final draft = 20%
 - Peer review and discussion of another student's paper = 5%

Readings and Films

Students will read one novel and watch one film for each of the five sections of the course: colonialism, independence and partition; democracy and authoritarianism; separatist movements and civil war; gender; and poverty and inequality. In addition, students will be assigned academic readings that will help to illuminate these themes.

The academic readings will be posted to Blackboard. Students should purchase the novels through Amazon or some similar vendor. Students can rent or purchase the films online from YouTube, Amazon, Netflix and other sites. For the sake of convenience, links to the films are provided below.

Required Novels:

- *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie
- *The Black Coat* by Neamat Imam
- *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje
- *The Upstairs Wife: An Intimate History of Pakistan* by Rafia Zakaria
- *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* by Deepa Anappara

Required Films:

- *Hey Ram* ([Hindi version](#); [Tamil version](#))
- [*Rajneeti*](#)
- [*White Sun*](#)
- [*Sairat*](#)
- [*Hindi Medium*](#)

Critical Reviews

Students will write four reviews, about 500 to 750 words in length, of four of the assigned novels or films. At least one of these reviews must focus on an assigned novel.

The reviews should critically engage the novels and films by drawing connections between them and the topics covered in the seminar. Consequently, they must develop an original argument or idea--these are not to be simple summaries of the books and films.

Students are encouraged to use these reviews to build material for the final paper/project by writing on a common theme across the sections such as caste, religion, regionalism or the legacies of colonial rule (note that this list is not exhaustive).

I will provide guideline questions that students can use to structure their essays. Students can also come up with their own questions in consultation with the professor.

Class Presentations

Each student will make one 15-20 minute in-class presentation pertaining to either a novel or film discussed in class. These presentations should: 1) provide a brief synopsis of the novel or film; 2) provide the class with helpful context for evaluating the issues raised in the novels and films; and 3) present the class with a list of issues and questions for further discussion and debate. As with the critical reviews, students are strongly encouraged to select a topic that they plan to write on for the final paper and to use the presentation as an opportunity to do some preliminary research on that topic.

Blog Posts

Students will post a question about the reading or film ahead of each seminar. These posts should be brief (no more than a few sentences). These questions should provoke discussion or debate and should be substantially different relative to earlier student posts. Please be sure to post your question by 11:59 p.m. the day before seminar.

Class Participation

This class is a seminar that meets just once a week; consequently, participation and attendance are essential to learning. Students will be evaluated on the frequency and quality of their participation. At the same time, the more vocal students in the class should be mindful of other students' need to participate. The emphasis should be on facilitating dialogue and not on dominating the conversation.

Final Paper (Extended Review Essay)

The primary assignment for the course will be an extended review essay of about 20 pages in length. This essay should build on a common theme across the course materials (e.g. caste, religion, regionalism, gender, regime type, etc.) and should focus on how literature and film help us to reflect on contemporary political challenges in South Asia. The critical reviews can and should feed into the term paper. Crucially, students will write a summary, outline and *multiple drafts* of this paper. This is the core assignment for the course and constitutes half of the course grade. It should therefore not be treated as a typical term paper. More details regarding the assignment will be discussed in class.

Formatting and Lateness Policies

For all papers, pages should be double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font and one-inch margins on all sides. Essays will be due at 11:59 p.m. on the date of the schedule final exam. The penalty for papers that violate these guidelines is an automatic *one-half letter grade deduction*. Students presenting a letter from a qualified professional may be exempted from this rule.

Part I: Colonialism, Partition and Independence

Novel—*Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie (446 pages)

Film—*Hey Ram* (3 h 30 min)

Week 1: Legacies of Colonial Rule (August 31)

- Lecture: "Understanding Colonialism's Impact on the Subcontinent"
- Read:
 - William Dalrymple, ["The East India Company"](#)
 - Susan Bayly, *Caste Society and Politics in India*, Ch. 3
 - Angus Maddison, *Class Structure and Economic Growth*, Ch. 3
 - Subrata Mitra, *Politics in India: Structure, Process and Policy*, Ch. 2

--No class September 7, Labor Day

Week 2: Partition and Communal Violence (September 14)

- Discuss *Hey Ram* ([Hindi version](#); [Tamil version](#))

Week 3: Independence (September 21)

- Discuss *Midnight's Children*

****Critical Review 1 due Friday, September 25*

Part II: Democracy and Authoritarianism

Novel—*The Black Coat* (265 pages)

Film—*Rajneeti* (2h 50m)

Week 4: State Capacity and Democracy (September 28)

- Lecture: "Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia"
- Read:
 - Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, Ch. 2
 - Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Rise of Hindu Nationalism"
 - Christophe Jaffrelot, "Caste and the Rise of Marginalized Groups"
 - Milan Vaishnav and Jamie Hinston, ["The Dawn of India's Fourth Party System"](#)

****Short summary (for final paper) due Friday, October 2*

Week 5: Clientelism, Criminality and Dynastic Politics (October 5)

- Discuss [Rajneeti](#)
- Optional viewing: *Jamtara—Sabka Number Ayega*
- Optional viewing: *Panchayat*
- Optional reading: *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth

Week 6: Authoritarian Legacies (October 12)

- Discuss *The Black Coat*

****Critical review 2 due Friday, October 16*

Part III: Separatist Movements and Civil War

Novel—*Anil's Ghost* (320 pages)

Film—*White Sun* (1h 29m)

Week 7: Separatist Conflicts in South Asia (October 19)

- Lecture: "Political Institutions and the Demands of Minority Groups"
- Read:
 - Aditya Adhikari, "The Fish in the Sea: Vignettes"
 - Alpa Shah, *In the Shadows of the State*, Ch. 6
 - Paul Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence*, Ch. 6
 - Neil DeVotta, "From Turmoil to Dynasty"

*****Comprehensive outline due Friday, October 23**

Week 8: The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal (October 26)

- Discuss [White Sun](#)
- Optional viewing: [Paan Singh Tomar](#)

Week 9: Sri Lanka's Civil War (November 2)

- Discuss *Anil's Ghost*

*****Critical review 3 due Friday, November 6**

Part IV: Gender

Novel—*The Upstairs Wife* (265 pages)

Film—*Sairat* (2h 54m)

Week 10: Women and Development (November 9)

- Lecture: "Women's Voice and Agency"
- Read:
 - Drèze and Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, Ch. 7
 - Robert Churchill, *Women in the Crossfire*, Ch. 1

*****First paper draft due to discussants on Friday, November 13**

Week 11: Honor Killings (November 16)

- Discuss [Sairat](#)
- Optional viewing: "Delhi Crime"
- Optional viewing: [Kappela](#)

Week 12: Gender, Politics and Religion (November 23)

- Discuss *The Upstairs Wife*
- Paper presentations

*****Critical review 4 due Friday, November 26**

Part V: Poverty and Inequality

Novel—*The White Tiger* (320 pages)

Film—*Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* (2 hrs)

Week 13: Growth and Inequality (November 30)

- Read:

-Livemint: [Everything You Wanted to Know About the Sen-Bhagwati Debate](#)

- Discuss [Hindi Medium](#)
- Paper presentations
- Optional reading: *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga

Week 14: Poverty and Corruption (December 7)

- Discuss *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*
- Paper presentations
- Optional viewing: [Pather Panchali](#) by Satyajith Ray.
- Optional reading: *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry

*****Critical review 5 due Friday, December 11**

*****Final paper due by end of day on scheduled date of final exam**