



HIST 243: MODERN SOUTH ASIA

Fall 2025

Professor: Tithi Bhattacharya
Class Meetings: 9:00-10:15 AM

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

This course introduces students to modern South Asian history and traces the lineages of the 'modern' from the time of Mughal rule. We will study the Mughal empire and explore its legacies after its demise; the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century successor states; the structure of British rule and organized resistance to it; and finally, key debates in the subcontinent's history and historiography. We will pay close attention to dynamic histories of caste, religious reform, and communal violence, and study the effects of colonialism on gender roles.

Course materials include both primary sources (diaries, autobiographies, speeches, and official correspondence) and secondary sources (historical accounts, review essays), and a selection of films.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Acquire basic knowledge of South Asian history including major political, social, religious, and cultural developments.
- Learn close reading of primary historical sources.
- Evaluate scholarly arguments, assess evidence and formulate historical questions
- Learn how to posit a grounded thesis and make an argument.
- Appreciate the role of history and historical memory in present-day debates.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Full and informed participation, one short Response Paper, a Mid- term and a Final exam.

Email and Address Policy: Please allow at least 24 hours for me to answer an email. I am usually quicker than that!

You will address me either as PROFESSOR or DOCTOR Bhattacharya. **No MRS. please!**

Participation: This course is structured around your active and informed participation. I will take attendance, and you will be expected to read the assigned scholarly texts and Primary Source Documents before coming to class.

A few tools to help you during the discussion sections—which will be every Thursday:

1. Do the reading and take notes on it.
2. Bring some discussion questions to the class for others to engage with.
3. Be prepared to refer to specific passages when making sense of the Documents.
4. Relate the document to some other themes we have studied in the course.

The class will be divided into small groups to facilitate discussion. You will be given specific questions or topics around which to frame your discussion notes a few days in advance of the discussion day.

On the day of the discussion, you need to come prepared with TWO copies of your notes on the

discussion topics. You will hand one copy of that to me and use the other to participate in the discussion. Attendance and participation in all discussions is mandatory; there is no possibility of make-ups in this regard.

Discussion notes will not be accepted after the discussion has already taken place.

Response Paper: 1 response paper, 2-3 pages, which reflect on the Citizenship Act, using the primary sources indicated and is due in class on September 2 on Brightspace. You then have to defend your thesis in class in front of your peers, so using AI to write the paper is not going to be very helpful here!

AND ALWAYS FOR THIS CLASS: the more primary sources you cite, the better it is!

Exams: The Midterm and Final Exam provide opportunities for you to review, to make sense of what we have read and discussed. I will explain their format in class.

Assignment	Grade Distribution	Date Due
Informed Participation	20%	Evaluation throughout the semester
Response Paper	20%	In class on Tuesday, September 2.
Midterm Exam	30%	Thursday, September 25
Finals	30%	TBA

REQUIRED TEXT

Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy by Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, 5th edition; ONLY THIS EDITION WILL BE ACCEPTED

You must use the Sources of Indian Tradition text as frequently as possible. Besides that, here are two other resources that might be useful. NO OTHER INTERNET SOURCE WILL BE ACCEPTED.

https://libguides.umn.edu/sa_primary_sources
<https://gouldguides.carleton.edu/history/southasia>

GRADING SCALE

Letter Grade	Points
A+	97-100
A	93-96
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	0-59

This course is NOT graded on a curve.

ACADEMIC PROCEDURES AND REGULATIONS

Attendance & Absences

I will be taking attendance for this course; I expect students to maintain regular attendance on lecture days. Most importantly, I expect you to complete all discussion posts, projects, and written assignments on time. No late submissions will be accepted.

However, I understand that you may have to miss a class or an assignment. If a student needs accommodation for more than two weeks of absence or missed assignment, they will have to contact the Office of the Dean of Students at (765) 494-1747 to discuss needs for support.

Technology in Class

Cell phones are not to be used in class at any time. This means that your phone should be turned off before class, and it should remain off for the duration of the class. This means, I do not expect to see you texting or otherwise using your phone during our class meetings. I am really serious about this. If you are expecting an urgent call or should an emergency situation arise before class, you should speak to me about this before class. Laptops and all other electronic devices are not permitted in this class. If a recognized disability or other condition necessitates the use of a laptop or other electronic device, you should present me with DRC-issued documentation to these ends. You are welcome to use digital/electronic versions of your required texts, but you may not have access to them during class meetings. If you use (and mark readings on) an e-reader, you should speak with me about this during the first week of class. You should not expect to have access to Brightspace during our class meetings. Please plan accordingly.

Protect Purdue Guidelines

Any student who has substantial reason to believe that another person is threatening the safety of others by not complying with Protect Purdue protocols is encouraged to report the behavior to and discuss the next steps with their instructor. Students also have the option of reporting the behavior to the [Office of the Student Rights and Responsibilities](#). See also [Purdue University Bill of Student Rights](#) and the Violent Behavior Policy under University Resources in Brightspace.

Accommodations

Purdue University strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, you are welcome to let me know so that we can discuss options. You are also encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center at drc@purdue.edu or by phone: 765-494-1247

Mental Health/Wellness

If you find yourself beginning to feel some stress, anxiety and/or feeling slightly overwhelmed, try [WellTrack](#). Sign in and find information and tools at your fingertips, available to you at any time.

If you need support and information about options and resources, please contact or see the [Office of the Dean of Students](#). Call 765-494-1747. Hours of operation are M-F, 8 am- 5 pm.

Emergency Preparation

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor's control. Relevant changes to this course will be posted onto the course website or can be obtained by contacting the instructors or TAs via email or phone. You are expected to read your @purdue.edu email on a frequent basis.

Academic Dishonesty

Cheating, plagiarism, and other dishonest practices will be punished as harshly as Purdue University policies allow. Please review this helpful guide on how to avoid plagiarism [here](#) and Purdue's plagiarism policy [here](#) Purdue University's Official Academic Dishonesty Policy is applicable to ALL assignments and papers in this course. Any instances of cheating or plagiarism, however slight, on any assignment or paper will result automatically in a failing grade for the ENTIRE course and referral to the Dean of Students for further disciplinary action. If you have any confusion on this matter please visit the Online Writing Lab on the web for their useful handout on plagiarism. You are always welcome to consult me about all your assignments.

NOTE ABOUT THIS SEMESTER

Patience will be the key to our success this semester. Let us try to be patient with each other as we learn new things and be generous with the way we handle challenges. I am always available to talk!

TENTATIVE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Please note that this schedule and the topics covered are subject to change depending upon a variety of factors. Changes will be announced in class. If you are not able to attend class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered.

WEEK 1: NO IN PERSON CLASS

Instead you have to work on the response paper explained below:

You have to write a 4–5-page paper on the Citizenship Act using the sources cited in this blog from Columbia University. Remember, the more different kinds of sources you use, cartoons, interviews, etc, the better it is.

You have to have a clear thesis for the paper. In the main body you must talk about the purpose of the law and its outcome. In conclusion you may reflect briefly on whether the law has had a positive or negative effect on the conversation about citizenship.

The paper is due IN CLASS on Tuesday, September 2. Time New Roman Font, 12 points. PLEASE STAPLE YOUR PAPER, I WILL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY LOOSE PAGES.

You then have to defend your thesis in class.

WEEK 2: Overview of South Asia and the Shifts in Power

Reading:

Bose & Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, chs. 1 (“South Asian History: An Introduction”), 2 (“Modernity and Antiquity: Interpretations of Ancient India”), & 3 (“Pre-Modern Accommodations of Difference: The Making of Indo-Islamic Cultures”), pp. 1-31.

Key Questions: Is South Asia a static, timeless society? Why is it thought as such? How have people of different faiths, cultures, and social backgrounds been accommodated in South Asia, and learn to accommodate others’ differences?

Key words: syncretism, reactions to Vedic Hinduism, Indo-Islamic civilization, multilingualism

WEEK 3: South Asia on the Brink of European Colonization

Reading:

1. Bose and Jalal, Ch. 4 and 5, pp. 32-51.
2. Primary Sources: (a) Letter to James I and (b) Bernier’s Account

Key Questions: How did the Mughals maintain authority in a highly decentralized state? What tactics did they deploy in order to co-opt potential rivals? Why were Europeans so drawn to India for trading opportunities in the 16th and 17th centuries? How did the British emerge as the most powerful European power in India?

Key Concepts and Vocabulary: Ibadat Khana, din-i-illahi, Akbar, Aurangzeb, Shivaji, mansabdari system, Mughals as a source of legitimacy and authority, “military fiscalism,” spice trade, Indian Ocean trade, Estado da India, East India Company, Dutch East India Company, joint-stock company, factories.

WEEK 4: Shifts in Imperial Power and The East India Company

Reading:

1. Bose & Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, ch. 6 (“The Transition to Colonialism: Resistance and Collaboration”), pp. 52-59.
2. Primary Source Document: selection from Nawab of Bengal, Richard Becher, Shah Abd Ul-Aziz pp. 52- 55 in *Sources*.

Key Questions: How did the East India Company transition from being a commercial enterprise into a political and military entity? Why did the East India Company feel the need to acquire territory and challenge local rulers?

Key Concepts and Vocabulary: Calcutta, Battle of Plassey, Battle of Buxar, nabobs, transformation of the economy of Bengal, diwani

Week 5: Review and Midterm

Please have the locked Brightspace Browser Downloaded on your device.

Midterm on Thursday, September 25.

Week 6: NO CLASS

Week 7: Constructing Native Culture and Company Rule

Reading:

Bose & Jalal, Modern South Asia, ch. 7 and 8, pp. 60-79.

Key Questions: What reasons impelled the British to begin educating select Indians in the English language?

Key Concepts and Vocabulary: Thomas Macaulay and his "Minute on Indian Education," Orientalist-Anglicist debates, Sati, Rammohun Roy, Thuggee

Week 8: Imperial Citizens or Rebel Subjects?

TUESDAY OCTOBER 14: FALL BREAK

Reading:

Bose and Jalal, Ch. 9, "Eighteen Fifty-seven: Rebellion, Collaboration and the Transition to Crown Raj", pp. 80-87.

Primary Source Document:

Karl Marx, "The Indian Revolt," New York Daily Tribune, 16 September 1857

Key Questions: Was the uprising of 1857 a mutiny, rebellion, or jihad? Was it "backward"- or "forward"-looking?

Key Concepts and Vocabulary: sepoys, Mutiny-Rebellion of 1857, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Proclamation of 1858, transition from Company Raj to Crown Raj

Week 9: Finals Prep Break

Week 10: Crown Rule

Reading

1. Bose and Jalal, Ch. 10, "High noon of colonialism, 1858 to 1914: state and political economy," pp. 88-97.
2. Video: Shashi Tharoor at the Oxford Union (2015)
3. Primary Source Document:
Dadabhai Naoroji, "India Must be Bled" (1900), in Poverty and UnBritish Rule in India, pp. 643-7

Key Questions: What major roles did India—and Indian resources—play in the British Empire? How did Indian political figures employ the “drain of wealth theory” to their advantage? Do the British deserve blame for the horrific famines of the late 19th century? Key Concepts and Vocabulary: drain of wealth theory, princely states, famines, famine codes, deindustrialization, Indian army, imperial darbars, Indian civil service, Lord Curzon

Week 11: Film Showing

Week 12: Nation in the Making and Reform Movements

Reading:

Bose and Jalal, Ch. 11, “A Nation in Making? ‘Rational’ Reform, ‘Religious’ Revival and Swadeshi Nationalism, 1858 to 1914,” pp.98-107.

- Primary Source Documents:

Dayananda Saraswati, “A Debate with a Christian and a Muslim” (1877) and “Against the Hindu Reform Movements of the Nineteenth Century” in *Sources of Indian Traditions*, ed. 2, vol. 2, pp. 56-60

Key Questions: What role did opium play in the economy of the British Empire? To what degree do Indians themselves bear responsibility for the opium trade with China? What central 6 ideas propelled religious and social reform in India? How did Indian reformers and conservatives contest the role of women in society?

Key Concepts and Vocabulary: opium trade, Brahmo Samaj, Rammohun Roy, Arya Samaj, Dayananda Saraswati, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, sati, female education, rationalism and positivism, Young Bengal, Young Bombay, Urdu vs. Hindi, religious revivalism

Week 13: Nationalism and Mass Movements

Reading:

Bose and Jalal, 12 (“Swadeshi Nationalism”) & 13 (“Colonialism Under Siege”), pp. 108-123.

Primary Source Document

Selection from Surendranath Banerjea’s *Memoir*, *Sources*, pp. 268-271.

Key Questions: Was early Indian nationalism a failure? Was it, as later critics charged, far too moderate in its aims, and far too elitist in its makeup? How successful was the Swadeshi movement? What were its various strands? What were the effects of World War I on India?

Key Concepts and Vocabulary: Indian National Congress, Dadabhai Naoroji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, moderate-extremist divide, Indian representation in the British Parliament, Indianization of the civil services, partition of Bengal, Swadeshi Movement, India in the First World War.

Week 14: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: Gandhian Politics

Readings:

Bose and Jalal, Ch 14 “Gandhian Nationalism and Mass Politics in the 1920s”, pp. 124-136.

M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (1909), selections

Key Questions: What key changes does Gandhi bring to the nationalist movement? What factors influenced the development of Gandhi's unique political thought?

Key Concepts and Vocabulary: Jalianwalla Bagh, M.K. Gandhi, satyagraha, ahimsa, non-cooperation, swadeshi, Rabindranath Tagore and knighthood, Khilafat, Palestine

Week 15: Review and Discussion |

FINALS DATE TBA