

History 186 Cultures of India

(Draft, Subject to Change)

WEB-Asynchronous Instruction Version

Instructor: Prof. Arafaat A. Valiani

Office location on Zoom: <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/94776387682>

From Thursday 31 March until the last day of classes in the Spring term, my scheduled office hours on Zoom will be: Wednesday 3:15pm-5:00pm, Thursday 3:00pm-4:00pm, and by appointment.

Email: [valiani@uoregon.edu](mailto:valiani@uoregon.edu).

GE: Breann Goosmann

Office location: McKenzie 340B

Office hours: Wednesday 9:30 am-11:30 am and via Zoom by appointment.

Email: [breann@uoregon.edu](mailto:breann@uoregon.edu)

GE: Melissa Wilk

Office hours: Drop in Zoom Session Monday 12:00pm - 2:30pm and by appointment.

Email: [mwilk@uoregon.edu](mailto:mwilk@uoregon.edu)

Summary: In this course, you will learn about the Indian subcontinent which is one of the most important economic and geopolitical areas of the globe and home to diverse and historically complex societies. According to contemporary political boundaries this consists of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Burma, Maldives and Afghanistan. To begin our journey, we will explore key topics which are applicable to both the past and present in the region.

What does culture mean in the context of the Indian subcontinent (also known as South Asia)? By studying archeological artifacts of the Indus Valley Civilization, courtly culture of the Mughal Empire,

British cultural domination and urban culture in contemporary Mumbai, this course introduces students to the study of culture in the Indian subcontinent from the ancient to present periods. We will examine a variety of societies, periods, and courtly cultures that have existed in the region over time however students are not expected to learn about all of the human history of the subcontinent. Instead, we will explore specific examples of cultural practice, power and resistance. Lectures and readings are organized around the concept of 'culture' which will be examined in relation to nine broad questions. The answers will, of course, vary across periods and contexts however students will be able to identify various important and different understandings of culture in ancient, early modern and contemporary South Asia.

Students successfully completing this course will receive four (4) credits toward the sixteen (16) credits required to satisfy the Social Science and Multicultural (International Cultures) requirements for either a BA or BS degree. History majors will receive credit toward their major requirement. This course fulfills a Global Context requirement for Business and Accounting majors.

**Remote Class Environment:** Due to the current public health crisis associated with the coronavirus pandemic, along with all UO instruction spring term, this class will be offered remotely. This are probably not ideal circumstances for learning, but we are undergoing an extraordinary historical event, and together we will do the best we can, to use the socio-technical tools available to us and create a learning community. Remote teaching and learning will be a challenge requiring us to engage this course with a spirit of flexibility, creativity, patience, and shared responsibility for creating a productive learning environment.

If you have or expect to encounter accessibility challenges (for any reason, whether related to access to technology, physical or mental health challenges, or economic or social concerns) I encourage you to do any one or more of the following: Contact the UO Accessible Education Center as soon as possible <https://aec.uoregon.edu>; Contact the Dean of Students Office to request the resources you need <https://dos.uoregon.edu>.

**Full Course Description (What you will do and learn):** We begin by first examining the material culture of the Indus Valley Civilization (2600-1700 BCE) which produced ancient cities and habits of social and economic life. We then study Vedic culture, which is said to have begun in 600 BCE, and we will learn how it simultaneously represented a worldview, an understanding of ethical life and a system of social organization in premodern India. We then move on to social and cultural practices of the Mughal Empire which combined sophisticated aesthetics and systems of social and political organization that were Central Asian-Turkic in their origin. In this particular iteration of cultural practice, we will learn

about how culture constitutes complex set of practices that accommodate diverse religious doctrines, forms of political organization and conceptions of beauty. Third, we will learn about the origin of the idea of 'Indian culture' which is a modern concept that arose with British colonial rule (1757-1947). Here, we will explore how the concept of 'Indian culture' has been used by colonial states and nationalist leaders which allows us to understand how the Indian past has become a category of social, economic and political power in the subcontinent. Lastly, we will study how culture can form a set of symbols, icons and memories to be circulated publicly. We trace how such symbols structure understandings in contemporary Mumbai.

**What does 'culture' means?** By exploring these issues students will be exposed to a cross-section of perspectives in South Asian history that are tied to issues of power, culture and aesthetics. With these conceptual tools in hand students will be able to decide which definition, or which combination of perspectives, they find the most convincing. In studying cultural histories of the region students will learn of the centrality of identity in various societies and states in South Asian history and the manner in which tolerance, as well as social exclusion, has manifested in these contexts. Specifically, students will receive a thorough grounding in the origins and evolution of caste and religious status in the Indian subcontinent, from the ancient to modern periods, and thus understand how historically specific beliefs that concern race, ethnicity and gender have not only informed acts of prejudice but also practices and policies of tolerance, pluralism/multiculturalism and secularism.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of term, you should be able to:

- Historically understand how the meaning of 'culture' has changed over time in the Indian subcontinent, and in comparisons with other societies globally.
- Analyze and interpret "primary" source data.
- Identify an author's argument or thesis.
- Write analytically and develop your own argument supported by evidence and data.

**Required Reading:** *The schedule (below) directs you to read specific portions of each text. In order to keep costs of required texts for this course down, assigned readings can be downloaded from Canvas or, where indicated, are available as ebooks from the UO library webpage.*

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Class Format: Remote learning

Because of the closure of the University of state ordinances requiring the public to remain in their homes, this course will be conducted remotely using Canvas. In addition to this syllabus, use the Modules tab in Canvas to access the readings and assignments. One text we will use at the end of term, *Mumbai Fables* by Gyan PRAKASH will be available as an ebook from the UO library. Please post questions about my recorded lectures or the readings on the Discussion thread, entitled *Questions about Readings and Lectures*, listed under *START HERE: Welcome to HIST 186 Cultures of India!* in the Modules by Thursday at the latest giving me time to respond afterward.

### Grading and Methods of Evaluation\*

Ten assignments (in Canvas) 10% each (Total %100)

\*All assignments need to be completed to receive a final grade.

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In addition to this syllabus, use the Modules tab in Canvas to access the readings and assignments.

### Assignment Policies and General class rules:

Assignment due dates: Please complete the assignments by the due date indicated in Canvas. They are both engaging and manageable, spaced out weekly over the term. Our expectation is that all students will contribute equally to group work and these assignments will be assessed using the grading rubric indicated in Canvas. Individual students who do not contribute equally to group work will not earn a passing grade even if other students complete the assignment to earn a passing grade. Please email me if you cannot complete an assignment. Given the circumstances, we are happy to provide accommodations if you provide us with a reasonable reason why you cannot complete an assignment.

Class materials cannot be purchased, sold, bartered or traded in any way and because such transactions constitute pedagogical disruptions to individual reading, writing and argumentation promoted in this course they will be treated as a form of disruption to student learning and a form of plagiarism and/or cheating. Note, as per the College of Arts and Science's policy regarding the sale of class notes, students cannot use no University-sponsored electronic media (including email) for commercial purposes.

All individual work that you turn in must be your own. Any work submitted for credit that includes the words or ideas of anyone else should, given the circumstances, be indicated with the last name of the author after the idea or quote (please include a page if quoting) (e.g. Valiani p 3). If you are confused

about this or do not understand the consequences of academic dishonesty at the UO—or the ethical issues behind these university policies—please read the UO plagiarism policy:

<https://integrity.uoregon.edu>

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I encourage you to take advantage of our office hours (listed on page 1) or to make an appointment to see one of us. If you have concerns or special needs please notify me, I am committed to accommodate students with disabilities.

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**Schedule** (This may be adjusted as we progress, I will announce any changes in advance and it will be posted on Canvas.)

## CULTURE IN ANCIENT INDIA

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**Week 1:** Where does Indian history begin?

# a) Introduction: South Asia—What, Where and When

## 1. b) The Indus Valley Civilization 2600 BCE-1700 BCE

- Jonathan Mark Kenoyer,

- 'Introduction' <http://www.harappa.com/har/indus-saraswati.html>
- 'Mohenjo-Daro' <http://www.mohenjodaro.net/mohenjodaroessay.html>
- Recommended reference:

## Methods of Interpreting Early India

Romila Thapar, 'Interpreting Early India', in *History and Beyond*

**Week 2:** How did the cultures of ancient India organize social life?

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## 1. Vedic Culture

Philip Lutgendorf,

- 'The Ramayana: A Telling of the Ancient Indian Epic',  
[http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/sac/The\\_Ramayana\\_A\\_Telling\\_Of\\_the\\_Ancient\\_Indian\\_Epic/](http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/sac/The_Ramayana_A_Telling_Of_the_Ancient_Indian_Epic/)
- How to understand the Ramayana, 'Oral Tradition and the Many "Ramayanas"',  
[http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/sac/The\\_Oral\\_Tradition\\_and\\_the\\_many\\_Ramayanas/](http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/sac/The_Oral_Tradition_and_the_many_Ramayanas/)

### 1. b) Duty, Honor and Gender in the Ramayana

- 'Prologue', 'The Wedding', 'Memento From Rama', in *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*, by R.K. Narayan.

-Watch between 15-30 minutes of *Sita Sings the Blues*, an award-winning film which is a contemporary take on the Ramayana (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8LvBnz7oRA>)

(includes captions)

## CULTURE AS A COMPLEX SET OF PRACTICES (Hybridity)

### Week 3: Who were the Mughals?

#### 1. a) Honor and Wealth

- *Ain-i-Akbari*, 'The Household', Treasuries and the Mint, the Army, pp. 11, 12-39.

-Recommended background reading: Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, Ch. 4, 'The Mughal Empire: State, Economy and Society', in *Modern South Asia*, pp. 28-38.

### Week 4: What is 'Mughal Culture'?

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#### 1. a) Courtly Culture of The Mughals

- *Ain-i-Akbari*, 'The Imperial Kitchen', Food and Its Meaning, the Fine Arts, and Etiquette, pp. 59-69, 102-115, 168-169

### 1. b) Power

- *Ain-i-Akbari*, 'The Divisions of the Army', 'The Mansabdars', 'The Ceremonial Weighing His Majesty', pp. 241-254, 276-278.

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## Week 5: Comparative Empires: the Court in Mandalay (Burma) and the British.

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### 1. a) Amitav Ghosh on Court Culture in Colonial Burma

- *The Glass Palace*, pp. 1-75

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### 1. b) Amitav Ghosh on Global Empire

*The Glass Palace*, pp. 76-137

## CONSTRUCTING INDIAN CULTURE

### Week 6: Is 'Indian culture' a constructed idea?

#### 1. a) Religion in the 'East'

- *Tree and serpent Worship, or illustrations of mythology and art in India in the 1st and 4th cent., Introductory Essay*, pp. 3-76.

#### 1. b) Culture and Resistance to Colonial Rule: The Rebellion of 1857

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's 1873. *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, pp. 1-17.

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**Week 7: Cultural Nationalism in British India**

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**1. a) Mohandas Gandhi and Indian Nationalism**

-Mohandas Gandhi, *Village Swaraj*, excerpt

-Documentary film: 'The Partition of India', of *A History of India*, available at

<https://uoregon.kanopy.com/video/partition-1947> (with captions and subtitles, UO login required)

**CULTURE AS PUBLIC SYMBOLS**

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**Week 8:**

**1. a) Power, Religion and History**

Interlude: Indian Art at the Schnitzler Museum

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**1. b) Urban Myths**

-*Mumbai Fables*, pp. 1-74

**Week 9: What is the difference between 'Bombay' and 'Mumbai'?**

**1. a) A Cosmopolitan Center**

-*Mumbai Fables*, pp. 75-157

**1. b) Tabloid City**

-*Mumbai Fables*, pp. 158-203

**Week 10: How does memory shape the city?**



## 1. a) Hindu Nationalism and Political Cultures

-*Mumbai Fables*, pp. 204-250 and 251-288

## 1. b) Dreamworlds

-*Mumbai Fables*, pp. 325-349

### Course Policies

If you have any reasons for not meeting this course's requirements please contact me to discuss them; it is advisable if you contact me well in advance of a request.

### **Knowledge, Writing, and Academic Honesty**

Your work in this class is subject to the University plagiarism policy. Presenting the work of other authors without citing them—or as your own—is a form of plagiarism and is unacceptable and in violation of the policy. This means that copying or paraphrasing any portion of a text or image from a printed or electronic source without citing the author and/or site is also a form of plagiarism. If you are confused about this or do not understand the consequences of academic dishonesty at the UO—or the ethical issues behind these university policies—please read the UO plagiarism policy:

<http://integrity.uoregon.edu/>

### University Policies

#### **Accessibility and Accommodations**

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. I encourage you to take advantage of my scheduled office hours (listed one page 1 and on the department website) or to make an appointment to conference with me. I will be happy to discuss this with you with the intent of supporting your academic success. If you have physical or learning differences that require special accommodations, I will do everything in my power to address all needs. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu).

## **Plagiarism**

Any work submitted for credit that includes the words or ideas of anyone else, unless a member of your group, must fully and accurately identify your source in a complete citation. If you are confused about this or do not understand the consequences of academic dishonesty at the UO—or the ethical issues behind these university policies—please read the UO plagiarism policy:

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## **Academic Misconduct**

All students are subject to the regulations stipulated in the UO Student Conduct Code:

<https://dos.uoregon.edu/conduct>

The instructor reserves the right to update and amend this syllabus as the term progresses.

## **Writing Resources:**

The Teaching and Learning Center on campus offers help with analytical writing. Their website has useful tips on how to write a thesis statement, how to structure and organize your argument and how to cite sources.

<http://tlc.uoregon.edu/learningservices/studyskills/essays.html>

## **How to interpret primary source documents**

Documents should never be accepted at face value. Begin by asking yourself the following basic questions. You may have to do some research to answer some of these questions and this may involve reading the front pages of the volume from which the documents originated. I often have the original volume so feel free to come and see me.

1. Who is the author? *What was/is his or her background? Whose point of view does the document represent?*
2. When was the document written? *What key events or prevalent concerns or processes of the time might inform the text?*
3. Why was the document written? *Who was its intended audience? How was the document meant to be used/what was it meant to do?*
4. Does the author have any discernible biases? If so, how do they affect the reliability and usefulness of the document?
5. Are there any interesting omissions in the text? What purpose might be served by those omissions?
6. What is the author's primary point? Why is she/he taking this position?

You will have answers for some of these questions (you should definitely have answers for questions 1 and 2). Other questions will not have obvious answers, and part of your task will be to deduce from evidence in the document itself what the answers might be. Next, ask:

7. **The central question:** \*\* What can the document tell us about the major events, processes or developments that are discussed in the readings for the day? \*\*

Here are some ways to approach this central question: *What can the document teach us about the attitudes, understandings, or goals that might have given rise to those events? What does it tell us about the strategies, policies, practices or debates that shaped historical events, processes, or outcomes? Does the document raise important questions, or highlight any key issues, about course themes or about other important matters (colonialism, tradition, modernity, cites etc....)?*

Different documents will shed light on different questions. Remember: Never take a document at face value. Cite evidence from the document in support of your argument. And remember: your response paper is primarily about **one document**. (Do not try to write an essay about all the readings.)