Spring 2008  
Honors 392, Section 002  
T TH 9:15 to 10:30  

India: Tradition and Modernity

Background and Rationale for the Course

This is an interdisciplinary honors course on India, which borrows ideas and topics from disciplines such as History, Fine Arts, Literature, International Business, Political Science, and Sociology. The aim of the course is to generate enough student interest in India, ancient as well as modern, so that they will realize why it is important for Americans to know about India, what lessons India and the United States can learn from each other, and how the past lives in the present, offering clues to what the future might hold. We will explore the viability, veracity, and desirability of a statement often heard, namely, “India and the United States are natural allies.”

In this course, we will discuss in what ways India well exemplifies the seamless continuity of the traditional into the modern. The play we are reading will illustrate this point very well in the cultural sphere. India has been a destination, a land to be discovered, for a long time from before the time of Alexander, from the time Chinese pilgrims would go to India to visit Buddhist holy sites there, from the time of Columbus and Vasco de Gama in the last decade of the fifteenth century to our own times. We will embark on our own journey to the discovery of India.

Topics to be Addressed

In the classroom we’ll discuss India’s history, geography, social structure, music, literature and the other fine arts, politics, economy, and generally India’s place and role in the modern world. We will analyze its problems, challenges, and opportunities by looking critically at its past and its present. We could discuss how India needs to adopt capitalistic socialism or
socialistic capitalism to bring about prosperity and economic equity or justice. We will explore its caste system (equivalence of caste and race); religions; democracy; Hindu-Muslim tensions; penchant for healing through patience, negotiation, and compromise; and its poverty, illiteracy, and disease. We will also discuss the effects on India (not just on the US) of outsourcing of jobs, the IT industry, and the almost exclusive use of the English language by the upper classes in India. The impact of Indian expatriates on both India and the U.S. will also be explored. We will try to cover the non-violent mass resistance movement under the guidance and inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi that earned India its political freedom from Britain, and any other issues of relevance on demand from students. Time is the only constraint; otherwise, no subject is taboo to talk about in our classroom.

At times, it may appear that I am emphasizing the ancient over the modern. But it is not because I think the ancient is more important than the modern. It is because for American students to access modern India is easier than the India of the remote past. With the help of the Internet and the abundant documentation available, it will be easy for students to learn about today’s India without much help from me (except for “my take” or interpretations of the data). However, students wanting to learn about ancient India will require a good deal of help from the instructor.

This course will also provide plenty of opportunities for both the students and the instructor to learn from one another. For one, the students being American will bring different perspectives on India from the one(s) the instructor has had being born and brought up in India. Secondly, the students and I will interact and exchange notes when we compare India with the U.S., for instance, the democracies in these two countries. Thirdly, the book summary assignment will allow several opportunities for all of us to be better informed than any of us could hope to be, if left to our own individual resources.

**Required Textbooks**

The mandatory texts will include (1) John Keay’s *India: A History*, (2) Shudraka’s *The Little Clay Cart*, translated by Prof. Arthur W. Ryder, and (3) David Cortright’s *Gandhi and Beyond: Nonviolence for an Age of Terrorism*. 
**The Little Clay Cart (Mrut-Shakatikam) by King Shudraka: A Brief Introduction**

This play mixes love between a generous, cultured, and once-rich young man and a beautiful, talented, high-class courtesan with slapstick comedy, a subplot in the form of a political intrigue, and a fascinating world of low class persons with their feet firmly planted on the ground. It is a world very different from the world of *Shakuntala*. It was uncommon to have for a heroine a courtesan, although a very sophisticated and educated one. Similarly, a Brahmin, by profession a merchant, was not that common either. There is a lot of action in this play with not a dull moment. The principal plot and the subsidiary plot are skillfully blended. They are original (not derived from the epics), and the rich diversity of characters gives this play an ambiance uncharacteristic of most “heroic” Sanskrit drama. Burglars, police officers, judges and juries, maids in love, lovers confused about their assignations, the king’s brother-in-law chasing a woman who doesn’t want him—all these jostle together, a “God’s plenty,” creating a comedy unparalleled in the whole gamut of the Indian theatre. Magnanimity, acts of kindness done without expectation of reward or reciprocity, is one major theme of the play. Another theme is the great power of love that transforms—literally as well as figuratively.

**Additional Readings, Movies, and Music**

We will also discuss the influence of the two ancient epics of India, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, on Indian ideals and ethos even today. We may visit the ancient text, *Manusmruti* or the Laws of Manu, along with the protest movement against it because that book is inextricably bound up with and provides the conservative ideology for India’s hierarchically structured caste system and its continuance to this day. We will also look at Kautilya’s *Artha-shastra* or A Primer of State Administration, which has been of immense influence in India through at least the last two millennia.

In this course, students will be encouraged to choose scholarly books on India by Indian as well as non-Indian writers for the book summary assignment. We will listen to some Indian classical or art music, both the Northern (Hindustani) and the Southern (Karnataki) styles. The class will review critically some of my papers/essays. If we find time, we may also be
able to view an Indian movie like *The Namesake* or *Monsoon Wedding* (both based on the immigrant experiences of Indians in the Western World; we’ll be able to see a lot of gorgeous Indian sarees in the latter movie). We may also watch some documentaries, such as *The Great Indian Railway* (1995) and *The Other Side of Outsourcing* (2004), the latter on a hot and controversial issue discussed widely in the media—exporting of white-collar American jobs to India.

**Policies**

(1) To create an appropriate ambiance and mood for this course, I’m encouraging every student to report to class any significant items about India they come across as they read, watch TV, listen to music, or surf the Internet.

(2) Oral presenters should finish their reports within the time allotted.

(3) Grades on the oral presentation portion are non-negotiable.

(4) Use of standard, “educated” English is expected for all assignments.

(5) Once presentation dates are set, students should stick to the schedule. If a student cannot make a presentation date, he or she must find a replacement so that the allotted time slot is not “wasted.”

**Approximate Time Allocation for Class Activities**

(1) **General lectures**
   - Two weeks
     - A. A bird’s eye view of Indian history
     - B. A look at India’s geography

(2) **Oral reports**
   - Three weeks

(3) **History: Lectures and discussion**
   - Three weeks
(4) The Little Clay Cart: Readings and discussion  
   Two weeks
(5) Discussion of my papers and Other Readings:  
   One week
(6) Manusmriti and Arthashastra  
   One week
(7) Gandhi and Beyond: Discussion  
   One week
(8) Three Essay Exams  
   Two weeks

Schedule

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<th>Months &amp; Dates</th>
<th>Topics and Assignments</th>
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| January 22, 24, 29, 31 | • Introductions: Students and Instructor  
                          • Discuss the syllabus  
                          • Ask students to write their academic profile, about their majors (and minors), their motivation for taking this course, their prior knowledge of India, etc.  
                          • Create a list serve for sharing documents.  
                          • Go over the political and physical map(s) of India: A “tour” of India.  
                          • A bird’s-eye view of Indian history  
                          • Discuss the **book summary** and **topic research** assignment.  
                          • Assign selected chapters from Keay – Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 (P. 56-154) |
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| February 5 and 7 | Discuss “Major Hindu Concepts” (Similarities between Buddhism and Hinduism)  
|               | Three principal deities of Hinduism:  
|               | - Vishnu/Krishna  
|               | - Shiva  
|               | - Devi (Parvati, Kali, etc.) |
| February 12 and 14 | Discuss the Maurya and the Gupta periods of Indian history.  
|               | Assign Chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 (p. 289-413) from Keay. |
| February 19, 21, 26 | Students view and discuss a National Geographic documentary, *The Great Indian Railway*.  
|               | Students read and discuss my handouts.  
|               | Indian Economy |
| February 28 | **Book Summary and Topic Research due**  
|              | Start oral presentations. |
| March 4, 6, 11 | Discussion of history chapters (Mughal, Maratha, and British periods (pp. 289-413)  
|               | Comparison of U.S. and Indian democracies |
| March 13 | Essay exam on Indian history |
| March 18 and 20 | Students watch and discuss Friedman’s documentary entitled, *The Other Side of Outsourcing* and *The Great Indian Railway*. |
| March 24 through 30 | SPRING VACATION |
| April 1, 3, 8, 10, 15, 17 | Lectures and discussion on *The Little Clay Cart*  
|               | Listen to Indian classical music. |
| April 22 | Essay exam on *The Little Clay* |
**Assignments**

The evaluation of student performance will be based on a book summary or a topic research project, and three essay exams:

**Book Summary**

1. The report should be approximately 10 pages--double-spaced, typed.
2. Select only scholarly books, published after 2000.
3. Do not choose novels, poetry, or plays (no light literature).
4. You must also include your own, original critical evaluation/review of the book, not from amazon.com. The report must clearly indicate that you have read and reflected upon the book.
5. The summary will be written, and presented in class orally.
6. A question and answer period will follow (400 points).

**Topic Research**

1. The project should be about 10 pages—typed and double spaced (Bibliography pages extra).
2. Select significant topics (They could be either on ancient India or on modern India).
3. Please run your topics by me to avoid duplication.
4. Research is required. Use all available and credible—Wikipedia is a doubtful case-- sources of research: Books, articles, the Internet (In the case of the Internet research, dates posted as well as accessed must be cited), etc. At least 10 sources should be cited.
5. Follow the APA or MLA style of documentation/citations.
6. The topic research should also be orally presented with a Q-A period (400 points).

My grade and evaluation of the oral portion of the report will take into account how competently and confidently you field the questions from the class.

The students will take one essay exam on the history portion of the syllabus around the middle of the semester after we have finished history-related discussions (200 points).

They will also take another essay exam on The Little Clay Cart (200 points).

The third exam will cover the Gandhi and Beyond book (200 points).

In all the exams, I would be looking for your critique/reactions to the textbooks, in other words, your insights and the persuasiveness of your arguments.

The class will be loosely organized and will be run like a seminar. It will depend heavily on student participation and student-teacher interaction. Attending class regularly and being prepared for discussions are crucial to any seminar experience.

**Total freedom of expression for the students will be a hallmark of the course.**