Course Description

Broadly speaking, the sociology of South Asia refers to the discourses of sociology and social anthropology as well as to other disciplinary discourses such as history, subaltern studies, political science, economics etc that have attempted to map the society, culture and the politics of the region. In this sense, a sociological contextualization of South Asia is a multidisciplinary enterprise. This collective discourse on the region indicates that many aspects of South Asian society and culture are relatively well researched even though there continues to be some country and region-specific silences. The sociological enterprise in South Asia which began as a colonial intellectual and political tool has by now emerged as a multifaceted discourse by itself, and has some peculiarities of its own linked to the specific intellectual developments in the region in general, as well as in specific countries in South Asia which indicates both its strengths and weaknesses. This course is the second component of a two-course module that will survey some of these developments from the 1980s to the present on a thematic basis through a close reading of selected texts. Most of these texts are from the discourse of formal sociology and social anthropology while some will be from related disciplines which have informed the sociology of the region. The survey will focus on ethnographic descriptions as well as their theoretical underpinnings and specific research orientations at different periods of time. The course is designed as an extensive survey of literature in the context of which students are expected to read a number of recommended texts and discuss them each week in class with the course instructor which will be supplemented with lectures and a series of films.

The suggested readings contain an extensive list of possible texts. The course instructor will select a series of texts from each section that will become compulsory texts for the course each time it is offered.

Course Structure

01. Political Sociology of South Asia: Ethnicity, religious identity, nationalism and political violence: In recent times, South Asia has seen considerable activity in what may generally be called the domain of politics marked by issue such as ethnicity, nationalism, religious identity, which has in some cases lead to sustained violence. A significant corpus of literature has been produced in this area that has attempted to understand sectarian movements based on ethnic or religious identity, formations of nationalism and the manner in which selective understandings of the past creates dynamics of often
divisive nationalisms and resultant violence. This section will focus on contemporary South Asian political developments addressing the following issues through a selective reading of some of the available literature:

- Ethnicity as a category of sociological analysis
- Ethnicity and religion in the politics of contemporary South Asia.
- Political violence, issues of governance and the rupture of democracy.
- Nationalisms and their consequences and interpretations.

Recommended Readings


2) The idea of ‘gender’ and women as a focus of research in the Sociology of South Asia: Strictly speaking, gender refers to the social and cultural construction of female and male biological attributes. But in the South Asian context, gender has more or less come to define what might be called women’s studies or research where the focus is the woman, her place and roles in society. Informed by feminist theory as well as the powerful post 1960s women’s movements in Europe and North America, this interest has come into being in the context of the almost exclusive absence of a focus on women in conventional sociological and anthropological research not only in South Asia but elsewhere as well. This section will explore gender research with a focus on women under the following sub-themes:

- The dynamics of ‘sexual scripts’ in social relations.
- Gender or the socio-cultural construction of the male and the female.
- The burden of the past: presentation of ‘women’ in traditional South Asian cultural discourses.
- Gender research in India and Sri Lanka.
- Gender research in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Recommended Readings


3) The study of masculinities in South Asia: The study of masculinities or exploring the manner in which the masculine is defined socially and culturally in the region is relatively recent interest in the sociology of South Asia emanating from about the mid 1990s. As a relatively recent intellectual development, this section will focus on theorizing masculinities as well how the idea of masculine has been understood in different South Asian contexts by focusing on selections of the emergent literature paying particular attention to the following sub-themes:

- Theoretical orientations in the study of masculinities in general and in South Asia.
- What does it mean to be ‘masculine’ in a conventional sense in the region?
- Contextualizing the themes of research into masculinities in research in South Asia.
Recommended Readings


4) Exploring urban space: Exploring urbanity and urban space within the contexts of economics as well as spatial and cultural geographies has been a relatively recent preoccupation in the sociology of South Asia. This section will focus on how space has been understood and managed at different times and places in the region as well as how it has been theorized in recent times. In this context, the focus will be on how culture plays a role in defining spaces particularly in urban contexts. Particular attention will be paid to the following paying particular attention to the following sub-themes:

- What does space mean over time and in history?
- Theorizing space in general and urban space in particular.
- History in understanding urban space in South Asia.
- Spatial politics in colonial and postcolonial South Asia.

Recommended Readings


Perera, Nihal. 2007. *The Transforming Asian City*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist University.


5) Migration in South Asia: Migration has been a global phenomenon that has change the direction of human history. In more recent times, in the South Asia region, migration has been the consequence of both political conflict and socio-economic considerations. Migration has resulted in large numbers of rural populations in many South Asian countries to go to urban centers in search of greener pastures seriously impacting urban infrastructure while migration across national borders in South Asia and beyond has resulted in the formation of significant ethnic diasporas of South Asian origin in countries beyond the region. This section will briefly focus on some of the chief characteristics of rural urban migration in the context of India and South Asian migration beyond the region. The following sub-themes will be the focus of discussion:

Recommended Readings


6) Exploring and contextualizing new technologies and cyberspace: New technologies including mobile telephones and cyberspace and the internet have become important domains of technology as well as social activity that have defined the present epoch. This range from their contribution to routine communication to the mobilization of people in mass movements such as the ‘Arab Spring’ in the Middle East as well as Ana Hazare phenomenon in India. In Europe and North America in particular, they have recently become important objects of sociological research focused on their enhanced
communicative and mobilizational potential as well as the socio-cultural and political processes they have shown to initiate. However, despite this research potential and the expansion of new technologies in the South Asia region, its impact has been relatively under-researched in the region. In the context of this relative absence, this section will focus on some of the socio-cultural implications of cyberspace and internet as a public domain, discuss selected research from other parts of the world and what is available from the region, and open a discussion on possible avenues of research in this area in South Asia. The following sub-themes will be the focus of discussion:

- The idea of new technologies and cyberspace and the internet beyond technical considerations: politics of anew public domain.
- The world of mobile telephones.
- Culture, social relations, familiarity and anonymity in cyberspace.
- The sociology of social networking.
- Cultural and political nationalism in cyberspace.
- Possible avenues of future research on cyberspace in South Asia.

**Recommended Readings**


**Method of Evaluation**

There will be three different evaluations as part of a continuous evaluation system: 1) Mid Semester Examination (20%), 2) Post-midterm paper(s) (40%), and 3) End Semester Examination (40%). Students are expected to clear the term-paper topics with the course instructor within the first six weeks of the course.