Nationalism and Regionalism in South Asia

(Optional Course for MA)

Total Credits: 04

Course Description

The aim of this course is to chart the ways in which South Asian nationalism and regionalism have been understood by anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists from the beginning of the colonial encounter up to the present era of global integration. In order to do this, the course revisits the global discourse on ‘nationalism’ and then examines what meaning this has taken in South Asia. Special attention will be given to the intersectionalities of ethnicity, religion, language and gender which define nationalism in specific contexts. Followed is an investigation on the idea of South Asian regionalism (or the lack thereof) as understood and practised by ordinary South Asians in their everyday lives. A small package of films have been curated to enhance students’ understanding of key concepts and issues as well as generate debates.

Is ‘South Asia’ a summation of the nationalism of eight South Asian nations? Or is there a popular South Asian sensibility beyond the political and economic apparati associated with SAARC? To answer this question, students should familiarize themselves with the modern history of nationalism and regionalism in South Asia which is linked to the rise of several nation states at the end of the colonial era. Nationalism and regionalism are not taken here as the static benchmarks with clear demarcations in between, but contested paradigms which can help interdisciplinary academic engagement on a series of loaded concepts.

This course focuses on the anthropological and sociological perspectives on nationalism, regionalism and their intersectionalities. The course will critically engage with classical theories and literary critiques both on nationalism and regionalism, while discussing the ethnographies of border and diaspora people. Comparative perspectives from geographies outside South Asia will be drawn in as relevant.

Selected chapters from the assigned books will be prescribed for class teaching. The remaining pages are suggested readings.
Unit 1: Theories on Nationalism. Situating traders in economy and society. What is ‘nationalism’? What do the words ‘nation’ and ‘nation state’ connote? Following the positivist discourse that lasted until the 1950s, meaning of the word ‘nationalism’ has shifted remarkably with the rise of a constructivist approach. The contemporary academic discourse in South Asia engages well with the global discourse but also contributes substantially to academia’s search for alternative understandings about nationalism. Both local and global discourses on nationalism and alternative nationalism will be studied in depth in this unit.

Unit 2: Intersectionalities – Ethnicity, Religion, Language, Gender. Intersectionalities are important signposts through which we can comprehend what nationalism means for common people in their everyday lives. This unit points out the fact that South Asian nations have had remarkably different experiences and trajectories vis-à-vis ethnicity, religion, language and gender. It then critically reviews the challenges posed by the rise of new identity regimes to the conventional theories and concepts of nationalism.

Ethnicity


Religion and Language:


6. Pandey, Gyanendra. 2008. The Construction of Communalism in Colonial north India. OUP: Delhi. [This can be found in Gyanendra Pandey Omnibus in library]


Gender


Unit 3: Regionalism. This unit juxtaposes European literature on postnationalism with South Asian discourse on alternative nationalism. The concept of popular regionalism is then situated within this discourse, and then examined at two levels: a localised lens of border town studies and a pan-national lens of diaspora studies. Where relevant, comparative perspectives are drawn from other continental regions such as Africa’s pan-African movement.

Postnationalism


**On South Asia**


**On South Asian borders and borderlands**


Note: This course will be complemented by a package of films. While most of the films in this package will be documentary films, some may be art or commercial films. The overall theme for this package of film is ‘The Home and the World’ following Rabindranath Tagore’s work on the idea of nationalism in South Asia. This package of films were originally curated for a film festival shown in Hyderabad in July 2014 during the 12th annual conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR).