Anthropology of South Asia
Lecturer: Dr Robert Parkin (University of Oxford)

This course will provide an introduction to the anthropology of South Asia, which for the purposes of the course means chiefly India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, on which there is most work available; other countries in the region may also be mentioned briefly. Countries like Iran and Afghanistan in the west and Burma in the east conventionally do not form part of the South Asian region.

The course should be of interest to students in a variety of disciplines and does not assume prior knowledge of either the region or of the discipline of anthropology. **Students who wish to achieve a mark in the course will be expected to do one class presentation from texts to be provided (listed below), plus a take-home essay of up to two thousand words to be marked later (a list of questions will be provided); the proportion of marks will be 30% for the presentation and 70% for the essay.** The texts provided can also be used as a basis for the essays. Lecture notes will also be provided, though their content and internal structure may differ from the lectures actually delivered. **Class presentations should be limited to no more than ten minutes each and should concentrate on the main points and arguments in the text being presented (NB: no presentations in Week 1).** Essays can be more comprehensive and wide-ranging.

The course will be held every Wednesday from 17.00 to approximately 19.00 from 7 September to 26 October. Students taking part in the course will be from both Riga and Kaunas, while the lecturer will be in Oxford; video-conferencing will be used to bring the three departments together.

**Lectures**

Week 1 (Sept. 7). **Introduction.** Arrangements for the course; expectations regarding presentations and essays. Very brief introduction to anthropology and regional studies in anthropology, general introduction to South Asia as a region; and **Caste: ethnography (i.e. case studies) and theory.** Is caste a religious institution, or rather economic? To what extent is it giving way to class in modern India? How do castes differ from tribes, also found in South Asia? [NB: no presentations this week]

Week 2 (Sept. 14). **Religions of Indian soil.** Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism. What do they have in common? How do they compare with the ‘introduced’ religions of Islam and Christianity?

Week 3 (Sept. 21) **Kinship and gender.** Arranged marriages and changes to them? Are arranged marriages forced marriages? To what extent are South Asian societies purely patriarchal? Women and agency.

Week 4 (Sept. 28) **Politics and nationalism.** The operation of democratic politics in India; the rise of the Hindu right.

Week 5 (Oct. 5) **Political economy and migration.** The growth of the Indian economy; changes to industrial employment and organization; gender and employment; migration as a coping strategy; diaspora societies.
Week 6 (Oct. 12) **Pakistan and South Asian Islam**. Why is Pakistan such a weak and conflict-ridden state? Ethnicity and regionalism as well as Islam as causes of conflict; military government, elite westernization and class.

Week 7 (Oct. 19) **Nepal**. Transition from the last Hindu monarchy to a Maoist-dominated republic; questions of ethnicity and identity—tribe and caste

Week 8 (Oct. 26) **Sri Lanka**. Sinhalese and Tamil identities and conflict; Buddhist nationalism and the reasons for it; Buddhist monasticism.

**Texts for reading and presentation**

**NB:** for selection only: there is no intention that all of these texts be presented in the classes.

These texts can also be read in advance of the lecture. Items in **bold** are advised if only one text is to be chosen for this purpose. **NB:** items in bold are not necessarily the texts to be presented in class for grading purposes: interested students have a free choice for this purpose.

**Week 1: Caste [NB: no presentations in first week]**

- **Gloria Goodwin Raheja**, ‘Centrality, mutuality and hierarchy: shifting aspects of inter-caste relationships in north India’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 23/1 (1989), pp. 79-99. *Is the caste system focused on the Brahman priest, as former theories suggested, or the king?*
- **Nicholas Dirks**, ‘The original caste: power, history and hierarchy in South Asia’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 23 (1989), pp. 59-78. *Earlier theories of caste saw the Brahman priest as all-important, but this was a consequence of British rule: the king was predominant in the traditional system.*
- **Robert Deliège**, ‘Replication and consensus: untouchability, caste and ideology in India’, *Man* 27/1 (1992), pp. 155-173. *Do the untouchables (low castes) accept their place in the system, or do they reject it where they can?*
- **Shalini Randeria**, *Carrion and corpses: conflict in categorizing untouchability in Gujarat*, *European Journal of Sociology* 30 (1989), pp. 171-191. *Illustrates some of the reasons for the untouchability of certain castes in so far as they are associated with death ritual.*
- **C.H. Fuller**, ‘Misconceiving the grain heap: a critique of the concept of the Indian jajmani system’, in J. Parry and M. Bloch (eds.), *Money and the morality of exchange. A critique of the theory that the jajmani system, based on caste, that governs the traditional Indian village is found throughout India.*
- **Kriti Kapila**, ‘The measure of a tribe: the cultural politics of constitutional reclassification in North India’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14/1 (2008), pp. 117-134. *On the legal differences between caste and tribe and the manipulation of these differences for reasons of positive discrimination by pastoralists in north-west India.*

**Week 2: Religion**


• Richard Burghart, ‘Renunciation in the religious traditions of South Asia’, *Man* 18/4 (1983), pp. 635-653. On renunciation and renouncers (or ascetics, sadhus), that is, those individuals who turn their backs on the caste system and on society generally to seek religious salvation.

• Jonathan Parry, ‘Sacrificial death and the necrophagous ascetic’, in Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (eds.), *Death and the regeneration of life*. On a sect of extreme renouncers who reduce their dependence on other people to the limit in their search for salvation. Warning: this text contains graphic accounts of bodily products and functions!

• Peter van der Veer, ‘Taming the ascetic: devotionalism in a Hindu monastic order’, *Man* 22 (1987), pp. 680-695. On devotion to a Hindu god as practised by the lower castes and women especially. Not renunciation, as the devotee is still in society.

• Stanley Freed and Ruth Freed, ‘Spirit possession as illness in a north Indian village’, *Ethnology* 3/2 (1964), pp. 152-171. On women being possessed by spirits as a reflection of their lack of agency and power in society.

Week 3: Kinship and gender

• Ursula Sharma, ‘Women and their affines: the veil as a symbol of separation’, *Man* 13/2 (1978), pp. 218-233. On a village in north-west India; the circumstances in which women must and need not veil respectively; the degree of agency they may have nonetheless.

• Helen Lambert, ‘Sentiment and substance in north Indian forms of relatedness’. In *Cultures of relatedness: new approaches to the study of kinship* (ed.) Janet Carsten. On the ritual adoption of in-marrying women in a village in Rajasthan, to prevent their isolation and disadvantage.


• Sharma, Ursula, 'Dowry in North India': its consequences for women, in Renee Hirschon (ed.) *Women and property, women as property*. Describes the dowry system in India, that is, traditional payments from the bride’s family to the groom’s family, associated with status.

• Julia Leslie, ‘Dowry, “dowry deaths” and violence against women: a journey of discovery’, in W. Menski (ed.), *South Asians and the dowry problem*, Ch. 2 (pp. 21-35). Discusses the association of dowry payments with violence to brides in India as a way of extracting further wealth from her family of birth.

Week 4: Politics and nationalism
Lucia Michelutti, “‘We Yadavs are a caste of politicians’: caste and modern politics in a north Indian town,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 38/1-2 (2004), pp. 43-71.

Sipra Tenhunen, ‘Culture and political agency: gender, kinship and village politics in West Bengal’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 37/3 (2003), pp. 495-518.


Pete Knorringa, ‘Artisan labour in the Agra footwear industry: continued informality and changing threats’, Ch. 10 in Jan Breman et al. (eds.), *The worlds of Indian industrial labour*.

Karen Kapadia, ‘Gender ideologies and the formation of rural industrial classes in South India today’, Ch. 11 in Jan Breman et al. (eds.), *The worlds of Indian industrial labour*.

Geert de Neve, ‘Asking for and giving baki: neo-bondage, or the interplay of bondage and resistance in the Tamilnadu power-loom industry’, Ch. 13 in Jan Breman et al. (eds.), *The worlds of Indian industrial labour*.


• Jayawardena, C. ‘Culture and ethnicity in Guyana and Fiji’, *Man* 15 (1980), pp. 430-450. *On different types of migration to Guyana and Fiji respectively and what this has meant for the construction of diaspora societies in the two countries respectively.*

Week 6: Pakistan and South Asian Islam

- Ian Talbot, ‘The Punjabization of Pakistan: myth or reality? In Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), Pakistan: nationalism without a nation? How true is the image of Punjabis as dominating the state of Pakistan politically, to the detriment of other ethnic groups?
- Mattison Mines, ‘Islamisation and Muslim ethnicity in South India’, Man (n.s.) 10/3 (1975), pp. 404-419. On how Muslims in major cities in Mumbai stress their Muslim identity in the city, but revert to a caste identity on returning to their villages of origin.

Week 7: Nepal

- Richard Burghart, ‘Hierarchical models of the Hindu social system,’ Man 13/4 (1978), pp. 519-536. On interpretations of caste in Nepal in the days of the monarchy: the different perspectives of the king, the Brahman priest and the renouncer or ascetic.
- David Gellner, Hinduism, tribalism and the position of women: the problem of Newar identity, Man 26/1 (1991), 105-125. On the status of the Newar people as caste or tribes and the influence of gender stereotypes on this discussion.
- Anne de Sales, ‘The Kham Magar country: between ethnic claims and Maoism’, in David Gellner (ed.), Resistance and the state: Nepalese experiences, Ch. 10. On the Maoist revolt in Nepal, which ended the monarchy; political recruitment and the identity politics of the Kham Magar tribe.
- Alan Macfarlane, Identity and change among the Gurungs of central Nepal, in David Gellner et al. (eds.), Nationalism and ethnicity in a Hindu kingdom: the politics of culture in contemporary Nepal, Ch. 5. On the creation of the Gurung as a tribal people of Nepal.
- Christian McDonough, Losing ground, gaining ground: land and change in a Tharu community in Dang, west Nepal, in David Gellner et al. (eds.), Nationalism and ethnicity in a Hindu kingdom: the politics of culture in contemporary Nepal, Ch. 8. On ethnic politics and access to land among a tribe on the border between Nepal and India.
- N.J. Allen, Hinduization: the experience of the Thulung Rai, in David Gellner et al. (eds.), Nationalism and ethnicity in a Hindu kingdom: the politics of culture in contemporary Nepal, Ch. 9. On the difference between tribe and caste, and on the impact of Hinduization in turning a tribe into a caste; in eastern Nepal.
**Week 8: Sri Lanka**

- **Gananath Obeyesekere,** ‘Social change and the deities: rise of the Kataragama cult in modern Sri Lanka’, *Man* 12/3-4 (1977), pp. 377-396. *On religious convergence between Hinduism and Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the former important for everyday affairs, the latter for life after death.*


- **James Brow,** ‘In pursuit of hegemony: representations of authority and justice in a Sri Lankan village’, *American Ethnologist* 15/2 (1988), pp. 311-327. *On the conflict between local values and Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in connection with a government project and how it was justified.*