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. 196) 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

- Chris Fuller, 'Gods, priests and purity: on the relation between Hinduism and the caste system', *Man* 14 (1979), pp. 459-476. *On the relationship between the hierarchy of caste and the hierarchy of different Hindu gods.*

- Ursula Sharma, 'Theodicy and the doctrine of karma', *Man* 8/3 (1973), pp. 347-364. *On the use made of karma, the doctrine of rebirth according to the worth of one's previous lives, in explaining misfortune.*
- 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.*
- C.H. Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan, 'Companionate marriage in India: the changing marriage system in a middle-class Brahman subcaste, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14/4 (2008), pp. 736-754. *On changes to traditional arranged marriages in India: how parents allow those getting married a say, without giving up control entirely.*
- Shalini Grover, 'Lived experiences: marriage, notions of love, and kinship support amongst poor women in Delhi', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 43/1 (2009), pp. 1-33. *On the actual operation of marriages among poor low castes in India: problems in the marriage, problems with relatives.*
- 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. *On the domination of a traditionally middle-ranking caste in present-day democratic politics in north India.*
- Sipra Tenhunen, 'Culture and political agency: gender, kinship and village politics in West Bengal', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 37/3 (2003), pp. 495-518. *On the operation of democratic politics in a village in West Bengal, with special reference to the role of women versus the role of male-dominated factions.*
- **Thomas Blom Hansen, 'The vernacularisation of Hindutva: the BJP and Shiv Sena in rural Maharashatra', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 30/2 (1996), pp. 177-214. *On the rise of the Hindu right, that is, Hindu nationalism, in Maharashtra and their modes of political activism.***
- Alpa Shah, 'Markets of protection: the "terrorist" Maoist movement and the state in Jharkhand, India', Critique of Anthropology 26/3 (2006), pp. 297-314. *On the rise of Maoism in eastern India and its implications for the presence of central state representatives in a local area.*
- Amita Baviskar, 'Tribal politics and discourses of environmentalism', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 31/2 (1997), pp. 195-223. *On the different agendas of middle-class environmentalists and tribespeople in preserving forests in western India.*

Week 5: Political economy and migration [NB: I have listed two items in bold here, one on political economy, the other on migration]

- Peter 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. On the decline of traditional shoemakers in India because of foreign competition and changes in manufacture; how caste differences between shoemakers and merchants are shaping the industry.*
- 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. On the change in employment from agriculture to industry (especially gem-cutting) in rural south India and how this is shaped by gender relations, as well as emerging class structures.*
- 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. On modes of recruitment of loom-workers in weaving factories in south India, in particular the practice of employers granting potential employees' financial advances as a form of bonded labour.*
- **Jonathan Parry 2003. 'Nehru's dream and the village "waiting room": long-distance labour migrants to a central Indian steel town', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 37: 217-49. *On a formerly public-sector steel plant, now privatised, and the impact of these changes on labour migration.***
- Fuller, C.J. & H. Narasimhan. "Information Technology Professionals and the New-Rich Middle Class in Chennai (Madras)", *Modern Asian Studies* 2006 41, 121-150. *On the rise of the IT industry in India, dominated by the more literate and educated higher castes, despite formal equality of opportunity.*

- **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.***
- Katy Gardner, 'Desh-bidesh: Sylheti images of home and away', *Man* 28 (1993), pp. 1-15. *On Bangladeshi migration to Britain that is economic in purpose only, with a lack of interest in assimilating to Britishness.*

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?*

- **Magnus Marsden, 'Islam, political authority and emotion in northern Pakistan', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 41/1 (2007), pp. 41-80. *On Ismaili dominance of northern Pakistan and its associations with a Persian, Shia cultural and religious heritage; how it copes with increasing Sunni militancy in the region.***

- Michael D. Fisher, 'Marriage and power: tradition and transition in an urban Punjabi community', in Hastings Donnan and Pnina Werbner (eds.), *Economy and culture in Pakistan*, pp. 97-123. *On arranged marriages and status in a society based on the religious equality of Islam; in a suburb of Lahore.*

- Nicolas Martin, 'The political economy of bonded labour in the Pakistani Punjab', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 43/1 (2009), 35-59. *On the dominance of large landowing castes in Pakistan and the ways in which they exploit bonded (unfree) labour.*

- 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 McDonaugh, 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.*

- **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.***
- Michael Carrithers, 'The modern ascetics of Lanka and the pattern of change in Buddhism', *Man* 14/2 (1979), pp. 294-310. *On the search for isolation from societies by Buddhist monks and the failures of those attempts.*
- Tennekoon, S. 1988. 'Rituals of Development: The Accelerated Mahaväli Development Program in Sri Lanka', *American Ethnologist* 15(2): 294-310. *On the place of ritual in connection with development projects in Sri Lanka and the connection between ritual, politics and administration in a post-colonial state.*
- 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.*
- H.L. Seneviratne and S. Wickermeratne, 'Bodhipuja: collective representations of Sri Lanka youth', *American Ethnologist* 7/4 (1980), pp. 734-743. *On the rise of a cult of the Buddha among educated but unemployed young people in Sri Lanka.*