

Religion and micro-politics in South Asia

Conceptual and empirical puzzles

South Asia seems to be divided along religious as well as political lines. While Pakistan is an Islamic republic frequently governed by military dictators, Bhutan and (until recently) Nepal are Hindu kingdoms, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are authoritarian democracies with constitutional provisions for the majority religion, and India professes to an idiosyncratic variety of secularism and counts as the world's largest democracy. Still, influential and sizeable religious minorities live in all countries, and history contains strong examples of religious and political pluralism alongside religio-political conflict. Either dynamic is necessarily enacted and experienced on the micro-level before it aggregates into systemic dynamics. This course therefore puts particular emphasis on micro-level case studies and agency-based explanations to understand the linkages between religion and politics on the subcontinent:

1. How can we adequately conceptualize religion for the South Asian context? What is caste and how does it relate to other categories of social stratification?
2. How did religion and politics historically interact on the subcontinent? How did the colonial and how does the postcolonial situation influence contemporary dynamics? How important is partition for the religious as well as political imagination in different countries?
3. Which insights into micro-politics of religion do ethnographic case studies provide? How does the village Pandit or Mullah relate to elected Panchayat representatives? What do Dalit activists mean when they ally with "fierce Gods" against upper-caste domination?
4. Can we comparatively assess why communal riots break out, whether religious parties rise or fall, or how caste associations gain power in the structures of political economy?

Teaching arrangements

The course is taught in two parts. Initially, it runs in the usual seminar format of presentations and class discussion. After the christmas break, however, we split up into small writing groups to kick off the essays and term papers together. Drafts of these are then presented in a joint block session with Daniel Pineu's class on "religion and politics in comparative perspective".

The block session adopts the structure of an academic conference, in which panels are formed according to students' interests and chaired by academics working in this field. This should on the one hand allow for substantial incorporation of personal preference and on the other hand familiarize students with an important format of academic interaction in a "protected" setting.

Course requirements

Active participation during class sessions and at the final conference as well as doing all indicative readings is expected from *all* students. Those who wish to obtain credits are in addition expected to engage with questions of religion and politics in South Asia independently. For BA students, this requirement consists of an oral presentation of 20 minutes before christmas, four written excerpts from the list of indicative readings by end of reading week and an essay - not exceeding 2500 words - on an issue related to the presentation. MA students have to write an individual term paper not exceeding 5000 words. Diploma and Magister students can choose either requirement. In any case, an outline of essays and term papers is due before christmas, a draft should be presented at the conference and the final version is due on March 15.

Assessment criteria

The very best essays and term papers are expected to put forward clear arguments, deriving from an extensive independent literature review and to convincingly answer explicit questions, in the case of term papers at self-chosen examples, in the case of essays related to the given author; presentations are only expected to synthesize the seminal work of that author. Term papers, essays and presentations are marked according to departmental guidelines; for BA students both essay and presentation contribute 50% towards the final grade.

Indicative readings

Indicative readings are available in ILIAS (password “dharm”). For BA, written excerpts of any *four* chapters (neither exceeding 500 words) *or* the Sharma book are due in reading week:

- A. Riaz et.al.: Religion and politics in South Asia, London: Routledge 2010 (any ch.)
- Y. Malik et.al.: Government and Politics in South Asia, Boulder: Westview 2008 (ch. 1)
- I. Strenski: Why politics can't be freed from religion, West Sussex: Wiley 2010 (ch. 1)
- U. Sharma: Caste, Buckingham: Open Univ. Press, 1999
- A. Nandy: The romance of the state, New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press 2007 (ch. 2)
- S. Corbridge et.al.: Reinventing India, Cambridge: Polity 2000 (selected chapters)
- B. Harriss-White: India working, Cambridge: Univ. Press 2003 (ch. 1, 6 and 7)
- P. Brass: The production of Hindu-Muslim-violence, Oxford: Univ. Press, 2003 (ch. 16)
- A. Varshney: Ethnic conflict and civic life, New Haven: Univ. Press, 2002 (ch. 3, 4, 12)

Articles and books on the extended reading list should be obtained independently and students are encouraged to pursue their own literature review. Should interesting material be found to be unavailable in Marburg, though, the convener might be able to provide an electronic copy.

Tentative course outline

October 18	Practical arrangements and compact introduction	
Theoretical approaches and seminal work (presentations)		
Oct 25 to Nov 8	Historical and ethnographic case studies	
November 15 and 22	Theories about orientalism and secularism	
November 29	Reading week: voluntary seminar session	excerpts due
December 6 to 20	Comparative studies on religion, economy and politics	outline due
Religion and politics (student conference)		
January 10 to 31	Small tutored writing groups (together with Pineu)	draft due
February 5 and 6	Conference: panels according to students' interests	

Contact and Feedback

In order for this course to be successful, it is not only essential to invest an adequate amount of work and thought. It is equally important to communicate questions, concerns, and criticisms in an open and timely manner. Throughout term, students are encouraged to contact the course convener with any issues they may have, at raphael.susewind@staff.uni-marburg.de, 28-25619 or in the speaking hours on Monday, 16-18, in office 00 007.

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Assigned presentations

Class sessions until christmas intend to provide students with a sound background in conceptual and seminal work which figures prominent in academic discourses about religion and politics in South Asia. It neither covers all possible topics nor all South Asian countries, but should enable students to make informed choices when they pursue independent questions in their conference papers. Presentations are expected to engage with the respective scholar beyond the basic readings and to synthesize rather than summarize. Co-presenters should consult each other before class and the course convenor in his speaking hours **latest one week ahead**.

Historical and ethnographic case studies		
Oct 25	M. Gandhi: Hind Swaraj	small groups
Nov 1	D. Mines: Fierce gods	Olivia
Nov 8	A. Sen: Shiv Sena women	Jenny
Theories about religion, caste and communalism		
Nov 15	L. Dumont: Homo hierarchicus R. Deliege: Replication and consensus	Gauri Nels
Nov 22	R. Bhargav: Secularism and its critics I. Strenski: Why politics can't be freed from religion	Adam Alex
Comparative studies on religion, economy and politics		
Dec 6	C. Jaffrelot: The Sangh Parivar S. Nasr: The vanguard of the Islamic revolution	Bronte Tony
Dec 13	A. Varshney: Ethnic conflict and civic life P. Brass: The production of Hindu-Muslim violence	Luca Shannon
