



O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL
Institution of Eminence Deemed to be
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**Jindal School of
International Affairs**
India's First Global Policy School

M.A. (DLB)0701– Politics of Health and Disease in South Asian History

JSIA Cross Elective – Fall 2026

Course Information

Course Duration: 15 weeks

Credit Hours:45

Meetings:

Location:

Prerequisites: Active participations in the classroom discussions and extensive readings of the course materials.

Equivalent Courses:

Exclusive Courses:

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Bikash Sarma

Biography: Bikash Sarma has offered a range of core courses at JSIA including State Formation; Peace, Conflict, and War; and Contentious Politics. He is currently working on production of racial, geographical, and medical human-nonhuman categories in India's North East.

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1. Course Description

With the recent experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a renewed popular and academic interest to understand epidemics as constituting a series of complex factors. The uncertainties surrounding the causes and consequences of the recent pandemic compelled some of us to turn back the pages of history to produce meanings out of a dreaded situation. It is in this context, the interdisciplinary course is designed to illuminate on some of the critical debates on health and disease in South Asian history. The objective is to underline: how epidemic diseases were perceived and understood at different historical junctures? How it was conceptualized and framed? How colonialism, race, places hinged upon such disease framings? How different actors both humans and non-humans were associated the epidemics? Through several cases studies the course will detail these questions. Further, disease will not be taken merely as a scientific and biological phenomenon, but as constituting a socio-political matrix. Here the paper will investigate the role of the colonial state and the indigenous politics of contention surrounding it. Lastly, the course would highlight some of the existing debates pertaining to global knowledge formations and its implications on the origin of the scientific discipline in question.

2. Course Intended Learning Objectives(Aim)

Course Intended Learning Outcomes	Teaching and Learning Activities	Assessments/ Activities
<p>The course will familiarize students with the historical and theoretical aspects of health and disease in South Asia.</p>	<p>In-depth class room discussions as indicated in the course module.</p> <p>In class reading and writing exercises.</p>	<p>Classroom Activities: Participation: It is imperative that the students come to every class meeting having read the day's assignments, so that they can participate in the discussion.</p> <p>The students will be writing a reflection paper during the course. These writing exercise will involve either a critical reflection on a theme or an assigned text.</p> <p>Individual presentations: All students individually will lead classroom discussions in the form of a presentation. The themes of the presentation would be on various aspects of</p>

		health and disease, as indicated in the course module.
The interdisciplinary course would illuminate on some of the critical debates on health and disease in South Asian history through various case studies.	Case study analysis.	Mid-term test: Survey of literature on a theme from the course manual (In-class).

3. Scheme of Evaluation and Grading

Evaluation breakup

Internal breakup: 70%

- Classroom participation: 5%
- Thematic reflection: 15%
- Classroom Presentation: 25%
- Mid-term test (in class): 25%

Components

- Classroom participation, readings, and thematic reflections.
- Classroom Presentation.
- Mid-term Test.

External breakup: In class written examination: 30%

Grade Definition

Grading and Comments			
Letter Grade	Percentage of Marks	Grade Points	Comments
O	80 and above	8	Outstanding: Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability.
A+	75 – 79	7.5	Excellent: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability.
A	70 – 74	7	Very Good: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing material and originality in thinking and presentation.
A-	65 -69	6	Good: Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills.
B+	60 – 64	5	Fair: Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills.

B	55 – 59	4	Acceptable: Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of the study and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B-	50 – 54	3	Marginal: Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials, and poor critical and analytical skills.
P1	45 – 49	2	Pass 1: Pass with Basic understanding of the subject matter.
P2	40 – 44	1	Pass 2: Pass with Rudimentary understanding of the subject matter.
F	Below 40	0	Fail: Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course.

4. Academic Integrity

Academic Honesty, Cheating, and Plagiarism. Plagiarism and/ or use of unfair means will be punished. Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words OR ideas without proper acknowledgement. Any idea, sentence or paragraph you take from a web source or from printed material must be cited.

Participation/Attendance Policy: Active participation in the class and a minimum of 75% attendance is mandatory for the students.

Use of phone/ texting/ laptop: laptops will be allowed in the class to be used for reading electronic sources.

5. Keyword Syllabus: epidemics, medicine, disease, politics, South Asia.

6. Course Material

Reference books:

David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-century India*, University of California Press, 1993.

Pratik Chakrabarti, *Bacteriology in British India: Laboratory Medicine and the Tropics*, University of Rochester Press, 2012.

Mark Harrison, *Public Health in British India*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Journals:

Contributions to Indian Sociology

The British Journal for the History of Science

The Milbank Quarterly

The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History

Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography

Bulletin of the History of Medicine

Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences

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7. Session Plan:

Session (with Date)	General Topic	Readings	Approach/Pedagogy
1.	Introduction		
2.	Colonialism and health	David Arnold, "Occidental Therapeutics and Oriental Bodies," <i>Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-century India</i> , University of California Press, 1993.	Class room discussions, debates, and short reflective write ups.
3.	Understanding medicine and disease in South Asia	David N. Livingstone, "Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene: The Anatomy of a Victorian Debate," <i>The British Journal for the History of Science</i> , 32:1,1999, 93-110.	

		Mark Harrison, “Tropical hygiene: disease theory and prevention in nineteenth-century India,” in <i>Public Health in British India</i> , Cambridge University Press, 1994.	
4	Tropics and the death-capes	David Arnold, “India's place in the Tropical World, 1770–1930,” <i>The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History</i> , 26:1, 1998(1-21). David Arnold, “Illusory Riches”: Representations of The Tropical World, 1840-1950,” <i>Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography</i> , 21(1), 2000(6-18).	
5	Disease and anxiety: hill stations, and sanitoriums	Nandini Bhattacharya, “The Sanatorium of Darjeeling: European Health in a Tropical Enclave,” in <i>Contagion and Enclaves: Tropical Medicine in Colonial India</i> , Liverpool University Press, 2012. Dane Kennedy, <i>The Magic Mountains</i> , University of California Press, 1996. [Sections].	
6	Disease anxiety: Tropical clothing.	Ryan Johnson, “European Cloth and “Tropical” Skin: Clothing Material and British Ideas of Health and Hygiene in Tropical Climates,” <i>Bulletin of the History of Medicine</i> , 2009, 83, 2009,530–560.	
7	Mid-term test	Survey of literature on a theme from the course manual (In-class)	

8	Malaria: from generic to a diagnostic category	Rohan Deb Roy, “‘An Imponderable Poison’: Shifting Geographies of a Diagnostic Category,” in <i>Malarial Subjects Empire, Medicine and Nonhumans in British India, 1820–1909</i> , Cambridge University Press, 2017.	
9	Reflections on Cholera	<p>Mark Harrison, “A Question of Locality: The Identity of Cholera in British India, 1860-1890,” in <i>Warm Climates and Western Medicine: The Emergence of Tropical Medicine, 1500-1900</i>, Rodopi B. V, Amsterdam, 1996.</p> <p>David Arnold, “Cholera: Disease as Disorder,” <i>Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-century India</i>, University of California Press, 1993.</p>	
10	Plague memories	<p>Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, “Plague panic and epidemic politics in India, 1896-1914,” in <i>Epidemics and ideas: Essays on the historical perception of pestilence</i>, Cambridge University Press, 1992.</p> <p>David Arnold, “Plague: Assault on The Body,” <i>Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-century India</i>, University of California Press, 1993.</p>	
11	Case study presentations		
12	Kala Azar at the Northeast	Bikash Sarma, “Medicalizing the Body	

	frontier	and the Locale: Kala Azar and Disease Thinking in Assam, 1824–1900,” <i>Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences</i> 81, 2(2024).	
13	Small-pox and indigenous perceptions/	David Arnold, “Smallpox: The Body of The Goddess,” <i>Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-century India</i> , University of California Press, 1993.	
14	Thematic reflection paper		
15	Revisions		