

School Logo

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MADLB 0611 – Culture, Belonging, and the Making of Modern India

MA & BA – Fall Semester 2026

Course Information

Course Duration: Fall Semester 2026

Credit Hours: 4

Meetings: Weekly

Location: TBC

Prerequisites: This advanced course is suitable for students who wish to learn the methodologies and disciplinary skills of History. They should have curiosity and a thirst to learn. Students opting for this elective will be compulsorily expected to read prescribed texts and participate in classroom discussions every week.

Equivalent Courses: N. A.

Exclusive Courses: N. A.

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Devyani Gupta

Biography: Dr. Gupta is Associate Professor in History at JSIA. Her research specialization is in the fields of colonial India, global history, and histories of the Indian Ocean littoral. She holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge and has held fellowships at the Universities of Göttingen and Leeds. Her recent book, *Across Colonial Lines: Commodities, Networks and Empire Building* was published by Bloomsbury UK in February 2023.

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1. Course Description

This exciting course will introduce students to the crucial role played by culture in processes of nation-building, as well as in the articulation of *identities of belonging* by the ‘potential’ citizens of the said nation. The idea of this nation and its unified people was described as ‘discovery’ by Nehru. Implicit in this phrasing was the belief of unearthing a sentiment which already existed in Indian society, and which was sharpened under the banner of the nationalist struggle for freedom.

However, in the context of the history of India, identities of belonging have also included multiple affiliations beyond that of national identity, to include identities deriving from notions of caste, region, denomination, language, etc., to name just a few. Moreover, identities in the subcontinent are not just pluralistic but often, heterodox. Consequently, projects of cultural articulation must also examine the often-exclusionary tendencies of the modern state as well. While investigating these junctures of unity and discontent, the student is encouraged to think of the distinction as well as connections between ideas of belonging, subjecthood and citizenship. Also, are identities and notions of belonging as tools of a modern nation state available only to humans, or can these ideas be ascribed to animals, artworks, clothing and even buildings?

This course will use the lens of history, especially cultural history, to interrogate aspects of ‘the modern’ in India’s past and by association, in its present. Through an analysis of films, theatre, music, sports, fiction and memoirs, ritual practices, art and architecture, nature, and conservation, this course will investigate the creation of individual, community, and national identities.

This course adopts an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of history, engaging with the work done by sociologists, anthropologists, music theorists, and art historians, (to name a few disciplines,) who have been engaged in writing on issues pertaining to culture and history.

2. Course Intended Learning Objectives(Aim)

Course Intended Learning Outcomes	Teaching and Learning Activities	Assessments/ Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The students will investigate the role of culture in fashioning ideas about identity, politics, and the human past, with a particular focus on colonial and post-colonial India.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lecture-cum-Seminar based classroom discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Class Participation and Response: 5%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">They will analyse the roots of South Asian diversity through	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Academic reading, writing and critical assessment training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Presentation and Seminar Lead: 15%

thematic case-studies on cultural histories of the subcontinent.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They will reconsider the history of concepts such as imperialism, nationhood, civil society, identity, religion, culture, and belief systems, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in analysing visual, audio-video, material, oral, and other sources of historical analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical Review: 10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They will also learn to identify the junctures of resistance, subversion, and appropriation, that narrate stories of subaltern experiences and their place within the hegemonic discourse of nationhood and nation-building in South Asian history. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdisciplinary pedagogy of the Humanities and Social Sciences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midterm Research Essays: 40%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students will learn to critically analyse a range of historical sources relating to the highlighted issues. They will be challenged to read, think, and develop well-reasoned, empirically based perspectives on the subjects covered in this course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemporary referencing of the historical past 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End Term Exam: 30%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will be an essential requirement for the students to formulate sophisticated and nuanced arguments in written and verbal form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site-based/ context-based interaction with sources and subject 	

3. Scheme of Evaluation and Grading

Class Participation and Response: 5%
Presentation and Seminar Lead: 15%
Historical Review: 10%
Midterm Research Essays: 40%
End Term Exam: 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: 30% Plagiarism qualifies as “Fail” Grade; penalty for 1-29% plagiarism.

Participation/Attendance Policy: 5% of final grade marked on classroom participation.

Use of phone/ texting/ laptop: No screens allowed in class.

5. Keyword Syllabus: History, South Asia, modern India, identity, culture, citizen, sociology, anthropology, politics.

6. Course Material

Textbooks:

- Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2004).
- Paul R. Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- Bipin Chandra et al, *India Since Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2017).
- Ayesha Jalal And Sugata Bose, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004).

Reference books:

- Joseph S. Alter, *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India*, University of California Press, 1992.
- Shahid Amin, *Conquest and Community: The Afterlife of Warrior Saint Ghazi Miyan*, Orient Blackswan, 2015.
- Rustom Bharucha, *Rajasthan—An Oral History: Conversations with Komal Kothari*, Penguin Books. New Delhi. 2003.
- Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987*, University of Texas Press, 1993.
- Ramchandra Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport*, Picador, 2002.
- Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity and Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.
- Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth*, Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Mahesh Rangarajan, *Nature and Nation: Essays on Environmental History*, Orient Blackswan, 2015.
- Sharmistha Saha, *Theatre and National Identity in Colonial India: Formation of a Community Through Cultural Practice*, Springer, 2018.

- Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, Indiana University Press, 2002.
- Martin Stierli, Sean Anderson, (*et al.*) *The Project of Independence: Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947–1985*, The Museum of Modern Art, 2022.
- Lisa N. Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*, Indiana University Press, 2007.
- Amanda J. Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India*, Duke University Press, 2006.

Journals / Magazines/ Web Sources: To be shared in class when required.

7. Session Plan

Session (with Date)	General Topic	Readings	Approach/Pedagogy
	<i>(Suggested)</i>		
Week 1	Methodology and Sources	Weekly readings of recommended texts; 40-60 pages p. w..	Interdisciplinary, academic pedagogy, based on classroom lecture-cum-seminar format, with student presentations and response, and weekly prescribed readings. (As discussed above.)
Week 2	Syncretism and devotion: Pir cultures of northern India	—do—	—do—
Week 3	Physicality and national identity: Akharas in modern India		
Week 4	History, community, and individuality: Subaltern narratives of selfhood		
Week 5	Chapbooks, almanacs, and 'vulgar' literature:		

	Gender and sexuality in modern India		
Week 6	Popular art and national identity: The aesthetics of calendar art		
Week 7	Dressing a nation: Clothing and identity		
Week 8	Levelling the playing field: Cricket and caste		
Week 9	Aural technologies and the listening public: Music and modernity		
Week 10	Mythology, realism, and socialism: The story of Hindi cinema		
Week 11	Revolutionary possibilities and the Welfare State: Indian People's Theatre Association		
Week 12	Ecology and the 'home': Oral histories of the subcontinent		
Week 13	Architecture of colonisation and de-colonisation: The making of Delhi		
Week 14	Subjecthood or citizenship? The tiger in Indian history	—do—	—do—