



MADLB 0702 – Reading the Empire JSIA Cross Elective (MA & BA) – Spring 2026

Course Information

Course Duration: Spring Semester 2026

Credit Hours: 4

Meetings: Weekly

Location: TBC

Prerequisites: This course is suitable for students who wish to learn the methodologies and disciplinary skills of History. They should be comfortable with reading assignments, as the students opting for this elective will be compulsorily expected to read prescribed texts and participate in classroom discussions every week.

Equivalent Courses: MADLB 0611, Culture, Belonging and the Making of Modern India. Also, MADLB 0567: Empire of Commodities; MADLB 0568: Historical World of the Indian Ocean.

Exclusive Courses: NA

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

The aim of this course is to situate the development in technologies of book production and printing as a revolutionary moment in the emergence of the modern world. From the rise of colonialism to the blossoming of nationalism, knowledge production and its institutionalisation formed the basis of modern ‘imagined’ communities. Students will be encouraged to consider the history and biography of books (and other print culture) as material objects that were at the centre of this articulation of politics, ideology and resistance. They will explore histories of how and why books were written, printed, transported, censored and even destroyed, while book trade engaged the lives and livelihoods of authors, printers, publishers, students, transporters, and so on. As the local and national imagination of society came to have literate expressions, students will unearth the crafting of a dynamic public sphere, as well as the emergence of various counter-publics, which will help throw light on themes of power, patronage, expression, and history in modern India. Through the lens of language cultures, knowledge production and information dissemination, this Course will teach students to rethink the history of empire.

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, investigating 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
The students will investigate the role of print culture and public sphere in fashioning ideas about identity, politics, and the human past, with a	Lecture-cum-Seminar based classroom discussions	Class Participation and Response: 10%

particular focus on colonial and post-colonial India.		
They will explore the social history of modern India through thematic case-studies on histories of the subcontinent.	Academic reading, writing and critical assessment training	Presentation and Seminar Lead: 20%
They will reconsider the history of concepts such as colonialism, gender, identity, nationhood, civil society, identity, religion, culture, etc.	Training in analysing visual, audio-video, material, oral, and other sources of historical analysis	Midterm Research Essays: 40%
They will also learn to identify the junctures of resistance, subversion, and appropriation, that narrate stories of everyday experiences and their place within the hegemonic discourse of nationhood and nation-building in Indian history.	Interdisciplinary pedagogy of the Humanities and Social Sciences	End Term Exam: 30%
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.	Contemporary referencing of the historical past	
It will be an essential requirement for the students to formulate sophisticated and nuanced arguments in written and verbal form.	Site-based/ context-based interaction with sources and subject	

3. Scheme of Evaluation and Grading

(Suggested)

Class Participation and Response: 10%

Presentation and Seminar Lead: 20%

Midterm Research Essays: 40%

End Term Exam: 30% (Long and Short Questions)

4. Academic Integrity

Academic Honesty, Cheating, and Plagiarism: 30% Plagiarism qualifies as “Fail” Grade; penalty for 1-29% plagiarism.

Participation/Attendance Policy: 75% attendance to sit in exams.

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

5. Keyword Syllabus

History, South Asia, modern India, colonialism, British Empire, book history, print culture, public sphere, knowledge, ethnography, anthropology, politics.

6. 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.
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7. Course Material Course Material

(Includes books, journals, periodicals, etc., as well as primary sources)

- 1) Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (2007).
- 2) Parna Sengupta, *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal* (2011).
- 3) David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape and Science, 1800–1856* (2005).
- 4) Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (1997).
- 5) Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (2000).
- 6) Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (1996).
- 7) Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778-1905* (2006).
- 8) Ashraf Ali Thanvi and Barbara D. Metcalf (eds.) *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Alī Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar, a Partial Translation with Commentary* (1990).
- 9) Durba Mitra, *Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought* (2020).
- 10) Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (2005).
- 11) Shobhana Nijhawan, *Women and Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere: Periodical Literature in Colonial North India* (2012).
- 12) Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (2006).
- 13) Anthony J. Parel (ed.) *Gandhi: 'Hind Swaraj' and Other Writings* (2010).
- 14) Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Gandhi in the Gallery: The Art of Disobedience* (2020).
- 15) Lakshmi Subramanian, *Singing Gandhi's India: Music and Sonic Nationalism* (2020).
- 16) Ritu G. Khanduri, *Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World* (2014).

17) Devika Sethi, *War Over Words: Censorship in India, 1930-1960* (2019).

18) Graham W. Shaw and Mary Lloyd (eds.)

Publications Proscribed by the Government of India (1985).

8. Session Plan

Session	General Topic	Readings	Approach/Pedagogy
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	Indian Ink: Print and transformation of Indian knowledge	—do—	—do—
Week 3	Reading the Bible: Religion and the printing press		
Week 4	Tropics and the Colonial Gaze: Reading the physical world of colonial India		
Week 5	Mapping an Empire: Cartographic reading of India		
Week 6	Information Panic: Knowledge-making and empire-making		

	in colonial India		
Week 7	The People of India: Anthropology and ethnography in colonial India		
Week 8	Power in Print: Book distribution and the book market in colonial India		
Week 9	Bahishti Zavar: Instruction manuals in modern India		
Week 10	Reading 'vulgar' literature: Love and sexuality in modern India		
Week 11	Women writing: Reading women's periodicals in modern India		
Week 12	Vernacular Print Cultures: Regionalism and nationalism		
Week 13	Gandhi writing, writing Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and its public sphere		
Week 14	Reading the Body: Gandhi		

	and his representations		
Week 15	Sonic Landscapes: Reading the sounds of Indian nationalism	—do—	—do—
Week 16	Revolutionary Texts: Reading proscribed literature		