Introduction and Objectives

This course is an introduction to debates on the constitution and modalities of ‘publics’ and ‘public life’, with a specific focus on the region of South Asia. Not only are we all part of something called ‘the public’, we also assume its existence in our roles as students, teachers, ‘fans’, citizens/ ‘netizens’, readers and so on.

How is the concept of a ‘public’ to be thought? What the various practices and technologies through which we come to be members of publics? What are the spaces and representations of people, cultures and events, through which we may identify and analyse the public? What significance do national boundaries and histories have for such analyses? How do these discussions help us look at the region named South Asia? These are some of the questions we will discuss, with the help of readings taken from recent ethnographic work by anthropologists of Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka, in conversation with historical accounts and political theory. Some background and above all, interest in the themes of the Core course ‘Approaches to Indian Society’ is assumed and will be helpful.

Content: Sections and Readings

We will begin by discussing the concept of ‘public’ distinguished from the ‘private’, and how to think with a category like ‘South Asia.’ Subsequent topics include studies of urban spaces; practices of reading, circulation of gossip and censorship; and visual publics created and sustained by cinema, movie posters, truck art and monuments. The course is divided into broadly four sections, consisting of the readings given below:

I. Framing Questions: Concepts
II. Spaces: Urban spaces and belonging, mobility
III. Words in the World: Circulation and media, prohibitions
IV. Arts of the Public: Cinema and other visual publics

Books (Extracts):


Articles:

Bate, Bernard. 2013. ““To persuade them into speech and action”: Oratory and the Tamil Political, Madras, 1905-1919.” Comparative Studies in Society and History 142-166. doi:10.1017/S0010417512000618.


Kant, Immanuel. 1784. “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”


This list may be edited as required during the course.

Mode of Teaching

Teaching will be based on lectures combined with documented class discussion in breakout groups, or discussion with the class as a whole. Starting with Section II, students may be chosen at random to lead the discussion on any given text in a class. After every lecture, time will be set aside for questions. Making connections between the readings and arguments across texts, as well as relating the readings to the contemporary world around us will be encouraged.
Learning Outcomes

This course will sharpen critical thinking by 1) showing how seemingly familiar terms like ‘the public’ and ‘South Asia’ are constructed, and 2) drawing attention to the ways these constructions impact our lives. It will familiarize students with the socio-cultural fabric of the nation-states comprising India’s neighbourhood and reflect on our shared histories. The emphasis on academic reading, writing and presentation skills will help students develop these for future work in their chosen field.

Requirements

1. **Regular Attendance:** Students are required to attend all classes, lectures and assignments. Failure to do this will have an appreciable impact on grades. Prior email notification of absence with a proper reason is essential.

2. **Participation:** A significant portion of the grade in this class will come from class participation, whether in discussion, asking helpful questions, presentations or writing assignments. Students will be expected to have read the text and come prepared to discuss it with the class.

3. **Presentations and Assignments:** There will be one presentation, to be subsequently submitted as a document, and two writing assignments, short papers of 1500 to 2000 words. Specific criteria for grading will be communicated beforehand. Timely submission of assignments is required. Plagiarism will be strictly dealt with and will result in a failing grade for the class.

Grading and Evaluation

On the principle of continuous assessment, the grades will be distributed in the following manner:

- Attendance: 10%
- Presentation: 25%
- Class Participation: 15%
- Assignments (2): 25% + 25%