COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will examine the concept of culture as it bears upon the articulation of both group and individual identities. We will interrogate what we mean by ‘identity’ – if it is a thing to be possessed, an essence in the character of a community or people, or something more complex, fluid and changing, or whether it exists at all. Through the course, these questions will be posed with reference to specific historical examples.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Starting from an understanding of the meaning of culture, this course intends to introduce students to some of the major debates on the subject of “identity.” From basic concepts and definitions, students will be introduced to contemporary debates on the problem of identity particularly those emerging from post-modernist positions. Are individual and collective identities primordial or are they historically constituted? Are identities fixed or mutable? How do individuals define themselves and their identities through active negotiations with political structures and cultural codes? This preliminary discussion will be followed by more specific case studies that would try to show how our individual and collective identities are born out of collective struggles for power among social groups who seek to impose and define identities of class, gender, caste, nation, religion through varied practices of domination over others. Through the course, these questions will be posed with reference to specific historical examples. The focus of the course is on the cultural and political history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asia but we also
study how aspects of the enormous social and economic change that took place during this period affected cultural and political processes.

**PRE-REQUISITES**

This course is for students who take a more than superficial interest in their society. This is ideally for students who have developed an interest in the themes and problems introduced in the AIS course. This is also for students who enjoy reading, writing and expressing their thoughts on issues that affect their lives not only as students of this Institute but as citizens of this country and the world at large.

**COURSE STRUCTURE**

Classes are organized around a number of themes: Changing environments; Urbanization; Caste; Religious Reform; Nationalism; Decolonization; and Postcolonial states. Gender is a theme that runs through the course. Topics to be covered within the thematic clusters include: technological change, the making of ‘peasant’ societies; colonial knowledge and colonial law, Hindu and Muslim social and religious change, Communism, Untouchability, Partition and its experience, ethno-linguistic and religious movements, democracy and military authoritarianism, urban societies and globalization. We will cover a period of approximately two hundred years with a view to understanding the historical processes that underpin some of the main debates around identity in South Asia.

This course will be based on a lecture and seminar format where students will be actively involved in class discussions, project work and periodic presentations. Apart from lectures, they will be given sets of readings which they will have to follow if they are to keep up with class discussions.

**EVALUATION**
A structure of continuous evaluation will be based on both written papers in response to specific readings (worth 60% of your grades) and an end semester research paper (worth 40% of your grade). The research paper will be based on a topic of your choice and involve the submission of a project report as well an oral presentation.

**COURSE OUTCOMES**

By the end of the course, students will expected to have gained a broad understanding and knowledge of the social, intellectual and political problems relating to modern South Asia. To be able to write critical, well-structured, well-researched and persuasive essays. To have challenged many of their assumptions about culture, identity and politics of South Asia and to be able to think more critically about the present.

**REQUIRED READING**

There are a series of general histories that you should make good use of.


Ludden, David, India and South Asia, A Short History (Oxford, 2002)

Metcalf, Barbara D. and Metcalf, Thomas, A Concise History of India (Cambridge, 2002)

Robb, Peter, A History of India (Basingstoke, 2002)


Readings related to more specific issues relating to the politics of identity include:

Benedict Anderson- Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism, London, Verso, 1983

Tapati Guha Thakurata- A New “Indian” Art – Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal 1850-1920) Cambridge, 1992
Gyanendra Pandey and Yunus Samad (ed) Faultlines of Nationhood, Roli Books, 2007
Sumathy Ramaswamy- Passions of the Tongue
Amartya Sen- The Argumentative Indian
Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (eds) Women and Social Reform in India
Tanika Sarkar- Hindu Wife, Hindu Mother