

Contemporary India

The World's Largest Democracy: From Panchayat To Parliament

Faculty: Dr. Ashish Kulkarni

U.S. Semester Credit Hours: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Class Code: PO/IS 391-07

Class Length: Semester

Delivery Method: Online

Language of Instruction: English

Subject Cross-listings: Political Science, International Studies

CLASS DESCRIPTION

There are millions of ways to try and make sense of India. You'll never get to your ultimate destination – a true understanding of India – but you're guaranteed a fascinating journey, which is often its own reward. Of these millions of ways, one is to try and understand India from a political perspective. Is India a country with a strong Central government, or is India a country with strong state governments? Or both? Mahatma Gandhi envisioned India as a collection of hundreds of thousands of village republics, while Dr. B.R. Ambedkar couldn't bear to countenance the idea.

India is one of the longest continuously democratic states in the developing world. This class offers an opportunity to understand the various institutions that govern India and the complex, diverse processes of governance—from local to national. Students will examine key concepts that have shaped relationships between the people and the state, as well as between national politics and local governance, and their impact on how social, economic, and cultural paradigms are structured in India. Pune, with its diverse demographics, culture, and landscape, is a perfect location to study how the institutions of modern parliamentary democracy function at different levels.

In this course, we aim to study the following questions, and reflect on some of the answers:

- Which models were envisaged by the men and women who fought for India's independence?
- Which models triumphed at the time of India's independence?
- Which model do we have today?
- How did the transition happen over time, and how was it shaped by India's many features and contradictions?
- How did India's many religions, many castes and many languages shape her political identity and reality, and how were each of these, in turn, shaped by her politics?
- What features of her politics will prove decisive for her future, and why?

The objective, at the end of the course, is to have a richer understanding of where India finds herself today. We will attempt to do this by studying India from the prism of political science, but also by occasionally borrowing learnings from associated fields of study.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe the primary political structures of Indian democracy (GA)
- Describe the key points of evolution and development of India as a democracy (GA)
- Compare different experiences with the political system in India (rural vs. urban, by caste, gender, religion, etc.) (UI, GA)
- Describe the relationship between economic and democratic development in India (GA)
- Follow contemporary political developments in India through local media outlets
- Become familiar with resources available for further research on the topic of the class.
- Make cognitive connections between learning in this class and other learning experiences in India.

CLASS DELIVERY

Students are expected to read or view assigned resources in advance and be prepared to actively discuss them in class. In some of the classes, the faculty will overview the topic and then facilitate a group discussion, drawing out relevant themes, following up on specific lines of inquiry, and prompting students' thoughtful engagement with the topic.

Students are encouraged to bring their prior learning experiences into class discussions (based on experiential learning theory) and to make cognitive connections between this class and others in India whenever possible (based on the philosophy of integrative learning).

CLASS OUTLINE

Session 1 – India at Independence: What was the political structure that was in place at the time of India's independence? How did the British arrive at the decision to grant India (and Pakistan) their independence? Was the transition well thought out, and if not, with what consequences?

Reading – Ch. 1 from Ramchandra Guha's India After Gandhi

Session 2 – Interpreting the Constituent Assembly Debates: How did the framers of India's constitution think about the nascent Indian republic? How and on what basis were the framers chosen? What were the key debates about, and how do they help us understand India better today?

Reading – Ch. 6 from Ramchandra Guha's India After Gandhi

Session 3 – Stumbling into the Sixties: What did India look like fifteen years after independence? How much of it was by design, how much of it by accident? How did these initial fifteen years influence what was to follow?

Reading – [Do's and Don'ts in 1960's India](#)

Session 4 – Indira Gandhi and the Sharp Turn Leftward: What was the impact of the nascent Nehru-Gandhi dynasty on India's political process, and on her economic outcomes? How did Indira Gandhi consolidate her grip on India's leading political party, and with what ramifications?

Reading – Ch. 13, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*, by Katherine Frank

Session 5 – The Centralization of Power and Trouble in the Neighborhood: What did the centralization of power in one personality mean for India? Similar processes were at play in India's immediate neighborhood, and they were a contributory factor in the 1971 war between India and Pakistan. What was the immediate and long-lasting impact of the war on geopolitics in South Asia?

Reading – *The Blood Telegram*, by Gary J. Bass

Session 6 – Rural structure and Economy: India's economy is as much about her villages as it is about her cities, and this has remained true despite attempts at increasing India's urbanization rate. What does life in India's villages look like from a political, but especially an economic perspective?

Reading – Elisabetta Basile, "The Institutional Embeddedness of Indian Rural Capitalism", in *The Changing Identity of Rural India: A Socio-Historical Analysis*, eds. Elisabetta Basile and Ishita Mukhopadhyay (Anthem Press India, 2009), 31-62

Session 7 – Caste and India's Politics: Understanding the emergence, the existence, the evolution and the essential embeddedness of caste in India's social fabric is critical to a deeper understanding of India. In this class, we *start* this process.

Reading – Gail Omvedt, "Caste, Agrarian Relations and Agrarian Conflicts", in *Studies in Indian Sociology: Agrarian Change and Mobilisation*, ed. B. B. Mohanty (Sage, 2013), 174-198

Session 8 – In class discussions

Session 9 – Federalism and Essence of India Democracy: Is India a country with a strong central government, or is India a country with strong state-level governments? How, for example, should one compare and contrast the political structure in India and the United States of America?

Reading – Manoranjan Mohanty, Federalism and Self-determination in the 21st Century, 9th B Janardan Rao Memorial Lecture, Warangal, Telengana (28/2/2011), 5-24

Session 10 – Panchayati Raj and Women's Participation: India decided to try and devolve power to the village level in the early 1990's. How successful was this experiment, and what role did gender have to play in it?

Reading – Ch.3 From Darkness to Light, Last Among Equals: Power Caste and Politics in Bihar's Villages M.R. Sharan

Field Visit: Bal Bharati to Kothrud New Road construction

Session 11 - Guest lecture on: Pune's Urbanization and how well it is going

Session 12 – Economic Development and Political Democracy: To what extent has economic development in India shaped her political processes, and vice versa? How much of this has been by design, and how much by accident?

Reading – Deepak Nayyar, Economic Development and Political Democracy: Interaction of Economics and Politics in Independent India, in *Democracy in India*, ed. Niraja Gopal Jayal (OUP: New Delhi, 2001), 361-396

Session 13 – Constitutional Design: Is India a republic in *practice*? Has the answer to this question remained the same over time? Whatever the answer, what have been the consequences to India over the last seven decades?

Reading – Upendra Baxi, "Outline of a Theory of Constitutionalism", in Rajeev Bhargava, ed. *Politics and Ethics of Indian Constitution*, (OUP: Delhi, 2008), 92-

Session 14 – 10 Feb 23: B. R Ambedkar and Caste in India: How does one understand the intersection of caste and the practice of politics in India? What role does caste play in the political calculus across all levels of elections in India?

Reading – Pushpendra, "Dalit Assertion through Electoral Politics" in *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, ed. Ghanshyam Shah (Permanent Black: New Delhi, 2002), 356-384

Session 15 – The Emergency and Its Aftermath: The imposition of the emergency is, by almost universal consensus, the darkest period in India's political history. How and why was it imposed, and how did India recover from it?

Reading – Ch. 22, India After Gandhi, Ramchandra Guha

Session 16 – In class discussions

Session 17 – India After Indira: On the 31st of October, 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own bodyguards. What were the contributory factors to the assassination, and what were the ramifications?

Reading – Ch. 25, *India After Gandhi*, Ramchandra Guha

Session 18 – Minorities and Ethnicities: India is an amalgamation of many religions, many castes (across religions!), and many ethnicities. How have these identities been understood and treated by both society and state?

Reading – Myron Weiner, “Minority Identities”, in *Politics in India*, Ed. Sudipta Kaviraj (OUP: New Delhi, 1997), 241- 253

Session 19 – Understanding Coalition Politics, and the Rise of State Level Parties: Prior to 2014, 1984 was the last general election in which one political party had a majority in India’s legislature. The intervening thirty years are the so-called coalition era in India’s politics. In this class, we aim to study and understand this era.

Reading – Ch. 13, *Jugalbandi*, Vinay Sitapati

Field Visit – Visit to village Velhe to meet village level politicians

Session 20 – Panchayati Raj in India: This topic will have been covered in brief in an earlier class, but in this class, we aim to study the 73rd and the 74th amendment to the Indian Constitution and ask why the amendments related to decentralization took so long to be passed, and whether they have been effective on the ground

Reading – [Governance and Development](#)

Session 21 – How has India Federalism Done? Is India more centralized today or less compared to the past? What are the advantages and disadvantage of this evolution of India’s political character?

Reading – “How has Indian Federalism done?” *Studies in Indian Politics*, July 2013, Sage Publications. (Ashutosh Varshney)

Session 22 – Entitlement Vs. Enablement: There are at least five policies that we will cover in this class – loosely speaking, the right to education, employment, food, health and information, although we will cover the right to employment in greater detail.

Reading – Ch. 1, *A Movement is Born, Last Among Equals*, M.R Sharan

Session 23 – The Politics of Personality: It is, today, impossible to avoid the presence of India’s current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi on everything ranging from vaccination certificates to

tweets by the government's cabinet ministers. Campaigns for municipal elections will more often than not focus on him. What impact is this having on India's political processes, and how will this play out in the near future?

Reading – Twitter and the rebranding of Narendra Modi, J Pal, P Chandra, VGV Vydiswaran - Economic and Political Weekly, 2016 - JSTOR

Session 24 – In class discussions: A class with no particular agenda from my side! I hope to spend this class reflecting upon all of what we've learnt thus far.

Session 25 – Future of Indian Democracy: What might India's future as a democracy look like? What has worked well in the last seventy-five years, and what has not worked so well? Prognostication is a risky business, but this class is meant more as a reflective exercise.

Reading – Lloyd I. Rudolf and Susanne Hoeber Rudolf, The New Dimensions of Indian Democracy, in their Real Institutions: State formation and Institutional Change (Oxford)

Session 26 – Summing up

RESOURCES

Students will have access to all required readings, videos, and other materials via Canvas. Please refer to all the resources defined for each class.

Additional Reading:

1. In spite of the Gods, by Edward Luce
2. Whole Numbers and Half Truths, by Rukmini S
3. India: An Uncertain Glory, by Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze
4. India's Long Road, by Vijay Joshi
5. Can India Grow, by Venkata Ananta Nageswaran and Gulzar Natarajan

EVALUATION METHODS

Your final grade in the class will be comprised of the following class requirements:

Evaluation Method	% Total of Final Grade
Attendance and Class Participation	10%
Assignment 1	20%
Assignment 2	20%
Assignment 3	20%
Final Assignment	30%

More details about class assignments are below. Specific requirements and grading rubrics for individual assignments are posted on Canvas.

Assignment 1

Write a reflective essay of no more than 1500 words on which aspect of India's political structure has surprised you the most, relative to your expectations. It is fine to write this essay in the first person, and a bibliography, though welcome, is not mandatory. I expect to understand what aspect of India's political structure has been a revelation for you thus far in your journey of having been a student of India's political process.

Assignment 2

Write a 1000-word essay on three newspaper articles that you have read thus far that have helped you understand India's political process. In the essay, I expect to read your reasoning behind the choice of these articles, what you've understood from having read them, and what about them has been unclear/confusing.

Assignment 3

If you had to design a question paper for a final examination for this course, what would your questions be? Write a 1500-word essay explaining your reasoning behind the questions that you will frame, and also include the questions themselves in an appendix. The format, length, and type of questions are up to you; they must, however, serve as an adequate test for your hypothetical student.

Final Assignment

Which class out of the twenty-four that we've had has helped you learn the most? Which was the least helpful? In both cases, explain why, and in the case of the latter, suggest a class that would, in your opinion, be a suitable replacement. No word limit for this essay, but it should be at least 1000 words in length. A bibliography is expected in this case, with a minimum of ten separate citations. These citations can be academic papers, newspaper articles, tweets, podcasts or blog posts.

Academic Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and experience academic barriers, please provide a letter from your home institution outlining the accommodations required. The faculty will discuss with you the accommodation plan for the class.

Timely Submissions

Assignments submitted after the deadline will be accepted at the discretion of the faculty and generally only in the event of a documented illness or emergency.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Everyone benefits by learning from each other; if you are not present, it affects everyone and negatively impacts the program. Class participation is expected and is a contributing factor to your final class grades. Students studying on this program class are required to attend all regularly scheduled classes, recitations, workshops and laboratory sessions; attendance will be

recorded. **You must notify your instructors and the Resident Director ahead of your absence from class or class-related activities.**

- The students can miss 6 classes of 1.5 hours each without academic penalty for the entire program.
- For next 3 class absences you get a first written warning,
- Next 1 absence the institution will be informed and second written warning will be given and student will be put on academic probation.
- With 13 class absences the student will be dismissed.

The absence can be excused only if the student has informed the resident Director and gives doctor's note.

Reasons for **excused** absences may include the following:

- Illness. The Resident Director must be notified before the start of the missed class. If the student misses class due to illness for two or more sequential dates, then **a doctor's note is required for the absences to be excused.**
- Hospitalization.
- Major religious holidays observed by the student's religion. Prior notice to the Resident Director is required.
- Activities required by police registration, another class, or internship. Prior notice to the Resident Director is required.
- Other circumstances according to the discretion of the Resident Director.

Reasons for **unexcused** absences may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Independent travel, travel delays, and/or resulting fatigue.
- Illness, without informing the Resident Director in advance or not providing medical documentation for two or more subsequent absent days.

Field visits are part of course and students are expected to attend all the field visits. The Aum excursion is designed to give space and time to students to process the experience till that time. We have experienced that this pause is essential for the success of the semester. Hence, this excursion is required.

GRADING SCALE

Grading scale for all classes:

Excellent	A	93 – 100%
	A-	90 – 92%
Good	B+	87 – 89%
	B	83 – 86%
	B-	80 – 82%
Acceptable	C+	77 – 79%
	C	73 – 76%
	C-	70 – 72%
Unsatisfactory	D+	67 – 69%

	D	63 – 66%
	D-	60 – 62%
Failing	F	<60%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Any academic endeavour must be based upon a foundation of honesty and integrity. Students are expected to abide by principles of academic integrity and must be willing to bear individual responsibility for their work while studying abroad. Any academic work (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfil an academic requirement must represent a student's original work. Any act of academic misconduct, such as cheating, fabrication, forgery, plagiarism, or facilitating academic dishonesty, will subject a student to disciplinary action.

Faculty: Dr. Ashish Kulkarni

Cell Phone: +91-96040-35320

Email: Ashish Kulkarni ashish@econforeverybody.com

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