

CET Syllabus of Record



Program: UW in India

Course Title: Gender, Caste, Community: Urban Geography in Context

Course Code: VR/ANTH 300

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Anthropology / History, Religious Studies, Sociology, Geography, Urban Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Environmental Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description

This multi-disciplinary course unravels the Varanasi's many layers through the lenses of gender, caste, and community. Working through a framework that sees these identities as dynamic, the course takes a historical approach to understand the modes through which people of different social backgrounds have inhabited the city. How does the built landscape intersect with the geography of identity? How are gender, caste, class, regional, and religious identities articulated within the urban space? How do we tease out the many cities within the city—temporally, spatially, and culturally?

In bringing together the tools of urban studies, women's and gender studies, ethnography and sociology, and blending classroom instruction with faculty-led field visits, this course offers students an opportunity to carefully observe, question, and explore their new surroundings, and to develop nuanced, thoughtful techniques to understand and skillfully navigate it. The course provides the scholarly grounding through which students can craft their own independent research projects, creative and fictional work, artistic visual projects, and reflections on the city that are informed by a nuanced and complex understanding of Varanasi as home to people of different genders, castes and communities.

Objectives

This course uses a variety of tools, including physical exploration and mapping, direct observation, conversations and experiential learning, as well as historical and ethnographic texts, to develop students' familiarity and relationship with the ancient city that will be their home for a semester or more.

By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to:

- Navigate the dense and winding *gulleys*, to correctly identify distinct *ghats* and their unique histories, and to distinguish historical layers that have grown up around (and on top of) this older core;

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- Describe and analyse distinct communities in Varanasi as they are defined geographically and temporally, and to be able to understand them through the lenses of caste and gender;
- Use their understanding of Varanasi to attempt to theorize about cities, their varying historical and cultural lives, and about patterns of urbanisation in general.

Course Requirements

There are no pre-requisites for this course. Students are expected to approach this complex, often difficult, always interesting city with energy and a spirit of adventure, and also to be prepared to read through and critically analyse textual material about the city. Given the multi-level approach to learning employed by the course, missing even one session could set a student back substantially in terms of learning outcomes. Therefore, all absences, apart from unavoidable ones resulting from illness or other emergencies, could result in grade reductions.

Course completion requirements include the following:

- Attendance and participation in class
- Participation in all field-based activities and excursions
- Weekly discussions of assigned readings
- Map exercises: on an almost weekly basis every week, students create mental maps of a route or location they have visited in Varanasi, indicating one or two points of reference—major landmarks or points of interest or significance to the student—with captions and audio or visual resources. As their familiarity with the city grows, students incorporate points of reference into paths, mini maps, and a final personalized map of the city.
- Review of contemporary news on Varanasi or journal posts about experiences and observations of the city.
- A mid-term exam
- A final project: this submission could take the form of a formal paper (6 pages), a studio or performing arts project, poetry or fiction.

Methods of evaluation

Student performance is graded on the following criteria:

Responses to and participation in discussions about readings.....	15%
Map Assignments.....	20%
News Review/City Journal Posts	20%
Mid-Term Exam.....	20%
Final Paper/ Project.....	20%
Final Presentation.....	5%

Required Readings

Arnold, David, "The Ecology and Cosmology of Disease in the Banaras Region", in Sandria B. Frietag, *Culture and Power in Banaras*, OUP, 1990, pp. 246-267.

Ciotti, Manuela. "Today We Can Touch Anything: Reflections on the Crux of Identity and Political

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- Economy” in *Retro-modern India Forging the Low-caste Self*, Routledge, 2009, pp. 52-81.
- Dalmia, Vasudha, ‘The Holy City as the Source of ‘Traditional’ Authority and the House of Harischandra’, in *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, Permanent Black 2010, pp. 50-145
- Dalmia, Vasudha, ‘Storming Citadels’, in Keul, Istvan ed., *Banaras Revisited: Scholarly Pilgrimages to the City of Light*, pp. 152-158, Harrassowitz Verlag 2014
- Desai, Madhuri, ‘City of Negotiations: Urban Space and Narrative in Banaras’, in Dodson, Michael S., ed., *Banaras: Urban Forms and Cultural Histories*, pp. 17-41, Taylor & Francis 2012
- Doron, Assa, ‘Hello Boat! The River Economy of Banaras’, Raja Rao, from ‘On the Ganga Ghat’, and Brij V. Lal, ‘Sunrise on the Ganga’, in Doron, Assa, Richard Barz and Barbara Nelson ed. *An Anthology of Writings on the Ganga: Goddess and River in History, Culture and Society*, OUP 2014
- Eck, Diana, ‘Preface’, ‘Introduction’ pp.-xiii-42, in *Banaras: City of Light*, pp.43-93, Columbia University Press 1998
- Freitag, Sandria, ‘Introduction: The History and Political Economy of Banaras’, in *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Performance and Environment 1800-1980*, OUP pp. 1-33
- Glushkova, Irina, ‘Banaras, the Concept of the trishali(-yatra) and the Inflow of the Marathas: An alternative view’, in Keul, Istvan ed., *Banaras Revisited: Scholarly Pilgrimages to the City of Light*, pp. 113-132, Harrassowitz Verlag 2014
- Ghosh, Swati, ‘Bengali Widows of Varanasi’, in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 35, No. 14 (Apr. 1-7, 2000), pp. 1151-1153
- Harvey, ‘The Organisation of Space Relations’, in *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, pp. 107-116 Routledge 2006
- Huberman, Jenny, “Consuming Children: Reading the Impact of Tourism in the City of Banaras’
- Pinch, William R., ‘Hiding in Plain Sight: Gosains on the Ghats, 1809’, in Dodson, Michael S., ed., *Banaras: Urban Forms and Cultural Histories*, pp. 17-41, Taylor & Francis 2012, pp. 77-109
- Kasturi, Malavika, ‘The Lost and Small Histories of the City of Patronage: Poor Mughal Pensioners in Colonial Banaras’, in Dodson, Michael S., ed., *Banaras: Urban Forms and Cultural Histories*, pp. 110-139, Taylor & Francis 2012

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- Korpela, Mari, 'Strong Vibes in Banaras: The views of Western sojourners on the Holy City', in Keul, Istvan ed., *Banaras Revisited: Scholarly Pilgrimages to the City of Light*, pp. 49-62, Harrassowitz Verlag 2014
- Kumar, Kuldeep. Hindi Belt: A Glimpse Into An Unfamiliar World [Review of Tulsi Ram's Autobiographies *Mardhaiya* and *Manikarnika*], *The Hindu*, January 23, 2015.
<https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-reviews/hindi-belt-a-glimpse-into-an-unfamiliar-world/article6815242.ece>
- Lee, Christopher R., 'The Alleyways of Banaras' and 'The Ka'ba of Hindustan', in 'The Ka'aba of Hindustan', in Dodson, Michael S., ed., *Banaras: Urban Forms and Cultural Histories*, pp. 17-41, Taylor & Francis 2012
- Massey, Doreen, 'Space, Place and Gender', in Miles et al ed. *The City Cultures Reader, Urban Reader Series*, pp. 307-310, Routledge 2009
- Mumford, Lewis, 'What is a City?', in LeGates et al ed. *The City Reader, Urban Reader Series*, pp. 85-89, Routledge 2009
- Parry, Jonathan, 'Through 'divine eyes'', in *Death in Banaras*, pp. 11-32, CUP 1994
- Raman, Vasanthi, 'Muslims in Banaras' and 'Banaras Muslims Today: Men and Women in the Warp and Weft of the Sari', in *The Warp and the Weft: Community and Gender Identity among Banaras Weavers*, pp. 61-133, Routledge 2010
- Ramaswamy, Sumathi, 'Enshrining the Map of India: Cartography, Nationalism, and the Politics of Deity in Varanasi', in *Visualising Space in Banaras: Images, Maps, and the Practice of Representation*, Gaenzle, Martin and Jorg Gengnagel, ed., OUP 2008
- Singh, Rana P.B., 'Banaras: Encountering the experiences and expositions of the spirit of the place', in Keul, Istvan ed., *Banaras Revisited: Scholarly Pilgrimages to the City of Light*, pp. 77-93, Harrassowitz Verlag 2014.
- Safvi, Rana. 'The Muslim Dewans Of Banares: Stories From My Family,'
<https://www.huffingtonpost.in/rana-safvi/the-muslim-dewans-of-banares-stories-from-my-family-a-21592957/>
- Wilson, Elizabeth, 'World Cities', in Miles et al ed. *The City Cultures Reader, Urban Reader Series*, pp. 40-48, Routledge 2004

Supplementary Readings

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- Gengnagel, Jorg, 'Kasidarsana – Kasi in Maps', Section 4.1, in *Visualized Texts: Sacred Spaces, Spatial Texts and the Religious Cartography of Banaras*, pp. 73-93, Harrassowitz Verlag 2011
- Istvan, Keul. "The Yoginis in the Kasikhanda of the Skandapurana" in "Blending into the Religious Landscape: The Yoginīs in Benares" in *Numen*, Vol. 59, 4 (2012), 380-385.
- Pinch, William R., 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Gosains on the Ghats, 1809', in Dodson, Michael S., ed., *Banaras: Urban Forms and Cultural Histories*, pp. 17-41, Taylor & Francis 2012, pp. 77-109
- Singh, Birendra Pratap, *Life in Ancient Varanasi: An Account Based on Archaeological Evidence*, Sandeep Prakashan 1985
- Singh, Rana P.B. and Pravin S. Rana, '8. The Panchakroshi, Pilgrimage on the Cosmic Circuit', in *Banaras Region: A Spiritual and Cultural Guide*, pp. 161-174, Indica Books 2002
- Singh, Rana P.B., *Cultural Landscapes and the Lifeworld: Literary Images of Banaras*, Indica 2004
- Singh, Rana P.B., *Banaras (Varanasi): Cosmic Order, Sacred City, Hindu Traditions*, Tara Book Agency 1993
- Singh Rana P.B. 2004. 'Tulasi's Vision of the Lifeworld in the Middle Ages'; in, *Cultural Landscapes and the Lifeworld. Literary Images of Banaras*. Pilgrimage & Cosmology Series: 6. Indica Books, Varanasi: pp. 112-128.

Film

Masaan

Masaan deals with the separate but similar journeys of a young Dalit man and a Brahmin woman in the city of Varanasi. The challenges they face and how they overcome them in a world riddled with social inequality forms the crux of the film

Mukti Bhavan

Mukti Bhavan is a film that follows the story of a reluctant son, Rajiv who must take his father to the holy city of Varanasi, where his father believes he will breathe his last and attain salvation. When his father finds a new life and sense of community in the city, the father and son must reconcile with their differences.

Dharm

The story is based in Varanasi and is about a highly revered and learned Brahmin priest who taken in a child to adopt as his own. When the priest realizes that the baby is the child of a Muslim woman, lost during communal riots, he is compelled to return the child. The film charts the journey of a traditional priest's acceptance of religious difference in the context of communal violence.

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Forest of Bliss (with accompanying book)

Forest of Bliss is a 1986 documentary film by ethnographic filmmaker Robert Gardner about everyday life in Benares. A visual exploration of the city without text and narrative, the film raises interesting questions about the ethics of documenting urban cultures.

Clips

Aparajito

The second part of Satyajit Ray's trilogy on the life of a young Brahmin boy which focuses on the life of his family in the holy city

Mohalla Assi

A controversial film that explores through lives of several Assi ghat residents, the commercialization of the pilgrimage city, and fake gurus who lure foreign tourists.

Raanjhana

The film explores the one-sided love of a Tamil Hindu boy for a Muslim girl in Varanasi.

Ghatak

This film about a wrestler who is also dutiful son explores gangsters and political power in the city

Water

Filmed in Sri Lanka after controversies over filming in Varanasi, the film explores the lives of Bengali widows exiled to sacred locations like Varanasi.

Feast of Varanasi

This is a psychological thriller that deals with the death of young women in the city.

Banaras: A Mystic Love Story

A young woman, Shwetambari is the daughter to wealthy parents, and studies at university in Varanasi. Conflict ensues when she falls in love with a low-caste mystic named Soham.

Laaga Chunari Mein Daag

This is a story of a Varanasi girl who leaves the city to earn for her family. When compelled to take up a job as an escort, or a call, girl, she must find ways to reconcile with the conservative expectations of society and the job that has allowed her social mobility.

Bas Itna sa Khwab Hai

The film explores the travails of a Varanasi boy in the big city of Mumbai.

Ram Teri Ganga Maili

The film deals with the travails of a woman from Gangotri in the brothels of Varanasi.

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Bismillah and Benaras: A Documentary

A film about the famous Shehnai player and his early life in the city, produced by Indian Ministry of External Affairs, Dir. Sushil Bharti: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chFMWi-hxEk>

Literary Writings

Amar Chitra Katha (English), *Bharatendu Harischandra*, *Andher Anagari Chaupat Raja* (English)

The graphic version (in English) of the well-known literary writer's famous work on the city where the ruler is absent/unwise.

Sevasadan by Munshi Premchand

It was originally written in Urdu under the title Bazaar-e-Husn ("Market of Beauty" or Red-light district). The novel a tale of an unhappy housewife who is beguiled away from the path of domestic virtue into becoming a courtesan. She then reforms herself and atones by serving as the manager of an orphanage for the young daughters of courtesans, the Sevasadan of the Hindi title.

Varanasi by MT Vasudevan Nair

The story of a young South Indian man's return to the city of his youth and the lives of those connected with his past.

Indian Journals by Allan Ginsberg

In this, famous poet notes down experiences of the city in prose and poetry

Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore

India's poet laureate returned to the city of Varanasi on several occasions and helped build the cultural life of the city including the Bharat Kala Bhavan, the art museum at Benaras Hindu University.

Outline of Course Content

Each of the topics listed below is supplemented by group field visits as well as structured individual explorations; each topic is covered over 2-4 weeks.

Topic 1: Early Historical Geographies: Gods, Goddesses, and Kings in the Early Myths of the City

- Focus on dynamics between different gods and goddesses, kings and rulers and religious groups in the city in mythology and early literary traditions
- Relevance of the city to early India
- Importance of Varanasi to worshippers of Shiva
- Varanasi as a site of sun worship
- Visible and invisible histories of Goddesses in the city
- Many ways of mapping and imagining the city
- Buddhist and Jain Varanasi

Topic 2: Marathas, Mughals and Muslim Weavers in Medieval and Early Modern Varanasi

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- Varanasi through the medieval period: the Marathas and the 3-sacred-site pilgrimage
- Maratha women and their contributions to Varanasi
- Mughals in the city
- Familial, ancestral and lineage-based claims to the city
- Varanasi as a city of Mughal exiles
- The arrival of the British East India Company
- From Julahas to Ansaris: the history of Muslim weavers in the city
- Caste and Gender among the Momin Ansaris
- Islamic cultures in the city: courtly life, poetry, and syncretic notions of the Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb in Varanasi

Topic 3: Community, Caste and Gender in Contestation Over Sacred Space in Colonial Varanasi

- City as we now know it as a result of deliberate politico-religious project of the late 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries
- The city's distinct regional enclaves, and the ways in which traditions that belong to faraway and often long-forgotten parts of the country and the world are maintained in local enclaves
- Divisions along religious and/or professional lines
- The Mohalla, the Haveli and Corporations: Forms of socio-economic organization in the City
- Widows, prostitutes and housewives in the city
- Caste and Dalit histories of colonial Varanasi
- Conflicting caste groups in the city

Topic 4: City, Nation and World: Literary Imaginations of Modern Varanasi Across Social Differences

- The place of Varanasi in the visions of modernity and nationalism in India
- Development of language and nationalism in the Hindi Heartland
- Baratendu Harischandra and his legacies
- Romantics and realists: the eclectic literary characters of the city
- Gender, class and the city: Ideas of social reform in Premchand's Sevasadan
- Dalit visions of Varanasi
- Rabindranath Tagore, Allen Ginsberg, Bismillah Khan, and Alice Boner– Artistic legacies in Varanasi.
- Cultural exchanges, ideas of Eastern and Western civilizations meeting in the city

Topic 5: Tourists and Visitors in Contemporary Varanasi

- Visitors to Varanasi
- The tourist gaze and the tourist economy
- Men, Masculinity and the Global City

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Topic 6: Environmental Challenges in Varanasi Today

- Pollution and the River Ganga (Ganges)
- Impact of pollution on different communities
- Crowd management on the *ghats*
- Urban planning and the growing city

Topic 7: Understanding Gender, Caste and Community in Urban Contexts: Theories, Frameworks and Conceptual Tools

- Thinking of Varanasi as an intersectional space
- Conceptualizing inequality and social difference in cities
- Challenges in urban geography