

Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
South Asian University

Urban Anthropology
(Optional Course for M.A.)
Total Credits: 04

Objectives of the Course

This course provides a survey of anthropological studies on space, place and the urban experience, with a regional focus on the cities of South Asia. Its first major objective is to provide an introduction to major anthropological and allied traditions of understanding urban space. Secondly, it seeks at an introduction to the dominant themes that have been specifically been utilized in the South Asian context. Thirdly, the course will attempt to understand South Asian cities as sites of difference, and contestation, as told from the vantage point and perspective of numerous urban actors. Fourthly, there is a focus on the impacts of globalization, new governance, financial, and consumptive arrangements and modalities that undergrid today's urban spaces. The course is also is finally concerned with examining perspectives on everyday life in South Asian cities as a way of opening up myriad research possibilities that remain outside of dominant narratives and paradigms.

Unit 1: Space, Place and the Urban

This module will focus on canonical traditions and perspectives that have historically been utilized to analyze urban space. The module will concentrate on four main paradigms. The first are classical structuralist readings of the city - notably Weber, Simmel and the Chicago school. The second paradigm, coming in the 1970s and 1980s, is driven by Marxist readings (Harvey, Castells, and broadly Latin Americanists). The third paradigm addressed is the postmodern/post structuralist literature on space and place-making which emerged in the 1990s. Finally, the fourth paradigm will be a modern history of urban planning as seen from the 1920s to provide students with a working vocabulary of the globally available possibilities of urban forms.

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- Scott, J. 1988. *Seeing Like A State*. New Haven And London: Yale University Press.
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Unit 2: Historical Development of Cities in Modern South Asia:

This module is designed introduce students to the history of the modern South Asian city, tracing the historical evolution of built environments, economic, political, social and cultural urban assemblages in the subcontinent in the modern period, especially since the advent of colonial regimes. The module focuses on the impacts of the colonial order on extant geographies, existing cities and in the fashioning of new kinds of settlements. It addresses the kinds of govern mentalities that came to be invoked and inscribed in managing cities. The module also examines the emergence of the postcolonial urban as cities became key sites of encounter, difference, negotiation, visceral experience and expression of new modernities. Finally, in the post-Independence period, it considers the legacy of the colonial

period for planners and residents of nationalist cities, and how, they in turn attempted to build cities as symbols of Independence and nationalism.

References

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Unit 3: Divided Cities: Public/Private, Segregation and the Production of Informality

This module examines three crucial divides witnessed in South Asian cities, as globally. The first divide refers to the differentiation between private and public spaces, most critically mapped onto domesticity and gender roles. The second divide refers to urban segregation as seen on a number of different axes namely caste, class, ethnicity and religion, and finally, the abiding division between formal and informal spaces, including their governance and management.

References

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Unit 4: Cities as Sites of Contestation

This module examines the South Asian city, particularly as a site of ethnic conflict, conflicts over citizenship and violence, considered here both in ordinary and extraordinary forms. In particular, the module is concerned with 1) everyday forms of hostility including as linked to economic and political processes and identity formation; 2) the emergence of symbolic regimes and public cultures of dominance, 3) the organization and experience of violence and riots, symbolically, logistically, spatially, and including the state's response.

References

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Unit 5: Neoliberalism, Globalization and New Aspirational Practices of Space-making

This module focuses on conceptual and ethnographic frameworks used to understand, and define, globalization and its impact on cities. The key question is to understand how new financial, consumptive, and technological capital impacts and restructures urban space. The module also asks how such restructuring frames the aspirations, possibilities, constraints, and uncertainties of contemporary urban life for different classes and communities in the city.

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- Sassen, Saskia 2001. *The Global city: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton: University Press.
- Zukin, S. 1991. *Landscapes Of Power*. Berkeley: University Of California Press.

Unit 6: Everyday Cities

This final module brings together ethnographies of everyday life in South Asian cities that cannot be categorized within the dominant intellectual narratives of the city. The module provides students with examples of ethnographic work on areas that are little studied, but which point to the large domains of everyday life experience that critically constitute urban life.

References

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