

Week 1 Agenda: Introduction to the Course

India and South Asia: From Area Studies to Ethnic Studies

This week will be used to welcome students to the course, put classroom procedures into place, and introduce the region.

LESSON #1: First Day

Purpose

- As you welcome students at the door, they will have an opportunity to meet each other and at the same time practice a little metacognition. The goal is to have an exciting start to the course while leaving yourself a little space before jumping into going over the syllabus or other first day activities!

Prep

- Write the following on the board at the front of the room or project it so that students can see it as they enter the classroom: "How much do you know about South Asia? Rate your level of knowledge from 1 to 5. Use those ratings to arrange yourselves in a line, in order from most to least prior knowledge."

Procedure

1. As students arrive to class, they should follow the directions that are written/projected.
2. You can expect this to take about 10 minutes.
3. If you want to make a randomized seating chart to start the year you can direct them from there, seating them so there's a mix of familiarity with South Asia in each section of the room or simply going in order of the line to simplify things.

LESSON #2: "Things to Know About India" Analysis and Gallery Walk

Optional Bell-Ringer: List everything you know about India and compare it with a neighbor.

Purpose

- The first week of school is usually pretty busy with school-wide and procedural obligations, so this activity is designed to continue students' introduction to the course.
- The goal is to increase student familiarity with academic knowledge about India while also beginning to think about how different academic disciplines approach knowledge.

Prep

- Students should be divided into groups of three.
- Each group will receive one of the items from a "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century" list (see handouts below).

- If there are more items than there are groups, make sure you have at least two items from each category. If you have the time you can have groups evaluate more than one item. Alternatively, there are 24 items so you could make this an individual endeavor if your class size is small enough.

Procedure

1. Divide students into groups of three.
2. Provide each group with one of the "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century" items. If you need to differentiate, use [rewordify.com](https://www.rewordify.com) to lower the reading level. You may also want to consider the variations in length and reading level of each individual item since there are likely more items than you have groups.
3. Groups should read and discuss their item, responding to the following prompts:
 - What is the main argument the author is making?
 - What is the evidence the author uses to support the argument?
 - How do you think the author's academic background influenced what they chose to be in the "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century?"
4. Using large sheets of paper or a shared digital presentation (such as a class-edited PPT or discussion post), each group should provide their responses to the above prompts.
5. After numbering them, tape the responses up around the classroom to create a gallery walk or ensure the shared digital presentation is accessible to everyone.
6. Have students consider the items and choose the *one* they find most compelling – the most important thing to know of all.
 - Optional Extension Question:
 - Did any of the authors disagree with each other about what is important?
7. Tabulate the results:
 - If using a digital presentation, identify the top three items and facilitate a class discussion followed by a final vote – declaring one item the winner.
 - If using a gallery walk, move the top four items to the various corners of the room. Have students move to the corner they would identify as the most significant of the four remaining items. Facilitate a discussion and see if anyone would like to switch corners after their classmates have defended their positions.
8. As an exit ticket/summative assignment have students complete this sentence: "Although there is a lot to learn about India, the most significant thing to know is _____ because..." and/or "Isolating one item as most important is difficult, if not impossible, because..."

India's Population is Youthful

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Source: Adhia, Nimish, Paavi Kulshreshth, and Ishaan Sethi. "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century." *Education About Asia* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2020): 9-12.

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-adhia-kulshreshth-sethi/>.

More than 50 percent of India's population is less than twenty-five years old. For the US and China, the percentages are 35 percent and 42 percent, respectively. India's burgeoning youthful population means more workers and savers. The resulting economic boost expected is termed as the "demographic dividend." India is the only large economy whose working-age population is expected to keep rising for at least two more decades. The working-age populations have been shrinking for a while in Japan and European countries, and more recently, in the US and China. India is thus a demographic outlier in a way that could give it some edge over other large economies.

But the size of the dividend will depend on how well the country harnesses the propitious demographic pattern. Are the youth properly fed, educated, supported, and liberated to realize their economic potential? On that front, the country's record so far has been mixed.

India's Gender Disparities are Severe

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There are approximately 940 women for every 1,000 men in India, while in North America and Europe, there are 1,050 women for every 1,000 men. Though low female-to-male ratios are observed in many Asian and North African countries, India's ratio is rather extreme. It is a product of two underlying disparities: (1) fewer girls being born compared to boys due to sex-selective abortion, which is illegal but prevalent; and (2) higher mortality among female children due to neglect. Both of these reflect a strong and stubborn cultural preference for male offspring.

Similar disparities permeate every sphere. Seventy-five percent of Indian men are literate, while only 53 percent of Indian women are. The labor force participation rate of women is 20 percent, the tenth-lowest in the world. The comparable rates in the US and China are 56 percent and 60 percent, respectively. While the school enrollment rates for male and female children are more or less the same at the primary level, the picture turns bleak once girls reach adolescence. Sixty percent of girls drop out because of early marriages, the stigma associated with menstruation, poor bathroom facilities at school, or increased threat of sexual assault. Fifty-six percent of women are anemic. The average height of adult women in India is among the lowest in the world, a consequence of their severe childhood malnutrition. Recently, some well-publicized cases of rape have drawn international spotlight on the country's record pertaining to gender violence. The statistics on domestic violence are particularly grim. In 2018, nearly 40 percent of violent crimes against women fell under the category of "cruelty by husband or his relatives." Overall, an estimated 28.8 percent of all women face spousal violence over their lifetimes. The collective treatment of women in India belies the country's aspiration to moral leadership.

What Indians Expect from Politics

Author: Itty Abraham, Head of the Dept. of Southeast Asian Studies (National University of Singapore); previously at Social Science Research Council (New York) and director of the South Asia Institute (The University of Texas at Austin); most recent book is *How India Became Territorial* (Stanford University Press)

Source: Abraham, Itty. "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century." *Education About Asia* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2020): 5-8.

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-abraham/>.

Although faith in government remains remarkably high, expectations of what government can and will do have changed a lot. If in the past there was an idea that the proper role of government was to act as a brake or regulator of the worst excesses of capitalism and social difference, that view is entirely discredited today. It is widely acknowledged that there is one set of rules for the well-connected and another for everyone else. No one seems to care that politicians inevitably become richer upon being elected while those around them benefit from rent-seeking opportunities that come in the wake of public office. Everyone knows that access to resources is directly correlated with the ability to shape outcomes—whether economic, legal, or judicial—to one's advantage. The government responds with alacrity to those who make the loudest noise, who also tend to be the already-privileged. Public protest is common, but not from those facing the everyday injustices of a deeply unequal and hierarchical society. Strikes, boycotts, marches, and protests are the everyday tactics of the well-established, not excluding professionals such as lawyers and doctors.

At the same time, and dating back to the origins of the republic, there is a continued if weakened expectation that "have-nots" must be cared for by the state. As India has become wealthier overall, welfare payments to the poor have increased in scope and size, eliminating the most egregious outcomes of poverty such as mass starvation. The economist Amartya Sen points out that the practical effects of a democratic system are such that while extraordinary deaths from famine have been eliminated, excess deaths due to the "slow violence" of everyday poverty are still very much in place.

Struggles for Justice

Author: Itty Abraham, Head of the Dept. of Southeast Asian Studies (National University of Singapore); previously at Social Science Research Council (New York) and director of the South Asia Institute (The University of Texas at Austin); most recent book is *How India Became Territorial* (Stanford University Press)

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For those who have seen the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement since 2014, beginning in Ferguson, Missouri, and becoming in 2020 the greatest expression of antiracial feeling in the US since the civil rights movement, social movements that seek to mobilize India's Dalits and Tribals will seem all too familiar. In fact, there are direct connections between these movements dating back to 1972, when radical intellectuals and writers named their burgeoning movement Dalit Panthers, inspired by the example of the Black Panther movement in the US. "Dalit" is the name claimed by the millions of people who are considered to belong to the lowest rung of the social hierarchy: so low that they are considered outside caste, "human disposal machines for the impurity of others," as one scholar puts it in horrifying language. If Dalits may be compared with African-Americans seeking equality and justice, the condition of Tribals in India is similar to once-sovereign Native American nations repeatedly dispossessed of their lands by missionaries, colonizers, settlers, and the military. Tribals are descendants of India's indigenous people, also dispossessed and forced into ever-shrinking forest reservations, although their sovereignty has never been recognized in law. Some Tribals have taken recourse to arms in response to their social and economic marginalization, to which the Indian state has reacted with violence of its own.

India may be a secular democracy in name, but it is also an extremely unequal and unfair place to live in if you are not wealthy, from the highest castes, the upper classes, or a straight man. The historical direction of change has been from pluralism and openness to illiberal authoritarianism. To be sure, India's massive size, diversity, and inefficiency of its security forces make it hard for any government to be effectively and evenly repressive. But for those who confront state power directly, there is very little recourse to the tacit and explicit protections that make the term "liberal democracy" meaningful in practice.

Indian Elections Are a Sight to Behold

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Every Indian federal election breaks its previous record as the world's largest electoral exercise. In the 2019 such election, about 900 million Indians were eligible to vote. Sixty-seven percent of them showed up at the voting booth, a percentage higher than in most democracies, including the US.

Indians take their elections quite seriously. The Election Commission, enjoying a high level of public trust where such trust is generally hard to come by, strives to set up enough voting stations that no voter must travel more than two kilometers (approximately 1.2 miles) from home. The commission's logistical feats are the stuff of Democrats' lore everywhere. Voting equipment is transported on elephants through thick forests, in boats across crocodile-infested swamps, and in sleighs over snow-capped mountains. For the 2019 elections, the commission set up more than a million polling stations, one of which was set up for the benefit of a single registered voter.

The elections are no mere formality; political power is seriously contested. Around 2,300 political parties (including those contesting only state or local elections) are officially registered. The 105,443 newspapers/periodicals registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) convey every shade of political opinion, from longing for British colonial rule to calls for a Maoist revolution. Incumbents are frequently voted out of office.

Election days have an air of festivity. People wake up early to queue outside the polling stations, with women decked out in their finest jewelry. The poor in India vote at a higher rate than the nonpoor, and at a rate higher than even the poor in developed democracies. It seems they maintain faith in the country's democracy and its promises.

Though there are electoral malpractices, very few people seriously dispute that the results by and large reflect the will of the people. The results, though, often upend the expectation of those with a high-minded conception of democratic politics. Forty-three percent of newly elected parliamentarians in the 2019 national election had previously faced criminal charges, ranging from hate speech and robbery to murder and terrorism.

India Has the World's Largest Militarized Zone

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Though the country justifiably prides itself for having assimilated many disparate regions, religious followers, and language groups into a single democratic nation-state, not all parts of the country sit easily within it. Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region that should have been part of Pakistan according to the logic of Partition, ended up a part of India, owing to a quirky turn of events. Consequently, the picturesque region of snow-capped peaks has been the site of competing territorial claims and two wars (in 1947 and 1965) between the neighbors. Insurgent guerilla warfare in the region continues and is abetted by Pakistan, which believes it has a right to the territory. Counterinsurgency operations by India have turned Kashmir, a region with significant tourism potential, into the world's largest militarized zone. The two countries' militaries, now nuclear-armed, face off along the world's longest militarized border and are always on a hair-trigger alert, providing the world a good scare now and then.

The Kashmiri population is bitterly divided by religion and on the question of their political future (India? Pakistan? Independence?), not that anyone is asking Kashmiris their opinion. Heavy-handed counterinsurgency operations by the Indian military wielding extrajudicial powers have resulted in innocents and dissidents being denied their civil liberties and human rights. It has alienated many of the region's moderates, radicalized its youth (burgeoning in numbers and underemployed as elsewhere in India), and convinced Pakistan further of India's fiendishness. The cycle of violence and heavy-handedness has escalated with no obvious end in sight, and it is incongruent with the country's self-image of a peaceful liberal democracy.

The Foreign Conquests of the Indian Subcontinent Must Be Understood In Terms of the Social and Political Conditions of Both the Conquered and the Conquerors

Author: Ainslie Embree was Professor Emeritus of History (Columbia University); formerly President of the American Institute of Indian Studies and of the Association for Asian Studies; he also taught in India from 1948-58 and served in the American Embassy in Delhi; among his many publications are *India's Search for National Identity*, *Imagining India*, and *Religion and Nationalism in India*.

Source: Embree, Ainslie. "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century." *Education About Asia* 08, no. 3 (Winter 2003): 7-11.

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century/>.

It may seem to be stating the obvious to argue that the foreign conquests in the Indian subcontinent must be understood in terms of the social and political conditions of both conquered and conquerors, but understanding many aspects of contemporary India depend precisely on this very difficult task ... Terminology [like] "the invasion of India," implying an attack on a political entity, comparable to a modern nation-state encompassing territorial India [and] the familiar phrase "the Muslim invasion of India" must be used with extreme care for a number of reasons. One is that there was no single state encompassing India, but many small kingdoms and principalities. Another is that the term "Muslim invasion" comes freighted from the contemporary world with connotations: terrorism rooted in a religious commitment to violence, a staple, unhappily, of political discourse in the United States and India at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The invasions were by groups of various ethnic origins who were adherents of Islam, and were attracted by the wealth of India. Arab traders, before they became Muslims, were active along the Indian coast, and it was Arab Muslims from Iraq who conquered Sind early in the eighth century. Later invaders were not Arabs, but Turkish chieftains from Central Asia who, beginning at the end of the tenth century, made inroads into North India, and by the middle of the fourteenth century had spread throughout much of India. The interest of these chieftains was the collection of revenue from the Indian peasants and merchants, not their conversion to Islam, although many thousands of the local people became its adherents.

After centuries of Muslim rule, the population of India remained overwhelmingly Hindu, and trade, commerce, and the banking system were largely in the hands of Hindus, as was much of the bureaucracy. The next major intruders, the British, came not as an invading force sent by a nation, but as a group of traders, the East India Company, eager to make money. While it began trading in 1600, the East India Company did not become a political power in India until 1765 when it gained control of the revenues of Bengal, the richest province of the Mughal empire. Great Britain was then on the way to becoming a great industrial nation It came to an India of great cities, well-articulated political systems, enormous agricultural population, an ancient textile industry, large external and internal trade, and religious and literary traditions that had developed over the course of two thousand years. The coming together of these two civilizations set the stage for the development of modern India as a great nation in the twenty-first century.

Not All Indians Are Vegetarians

Author: Itty Abraham, Head of the Dept. of Southeast Asian Studies (National University of Singapore); previously at Social Science Research Council (New York) and director of the South Asia Institute (The University of Texas at Austin); most recent book is *How India Became Territorial* (Stanford University Press)

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There is a common impression that most Indians are vegetarians. Far from it. Indians eat all manner of meats, including beef and pork, with mutton—the name given to goat meat in India—the most expensive meat in a typical food market. Chicken has become increasingly popular in recent decades, with industrial broiler farms becoming more common, leading to greater supply and lower cost, even if at the expense of taste, as many would argue. American-style fast food restaurants, including the bright red splash of a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet, are now common sights in most Indian cities. Of course, for religious reasons, Hindus may choose not to eat beef and Muslims pork. As with linguistic diversity, food habits vary considerably by region.

Broadly speaking, Northern Indians prefer wheat, while the south is a rice-dominated area. In the heavily Christian-populated northeast zone of the country abutting Burma/Myanmar and Tibet, pork is extremely popular. In the south, it is not uncommon to cook food in coconut oil, while in (eastern) Bengal, mustard oil is a must in every kitchen. Fish and seafood are widely eaten on the coasts. Each region of India claims to have its own indigenous mango, the most popular fruit in India. Disagreements about which mango is the best variety have torn friends and families apart for centuries. Being "pure" vegetarian was long associated with being upper caste, especially Brahmin. That association remains true today, even as the ranks of vegetarians have swelled due to modern urban concerns about health, looks, and global peer pressure.

India is the Most Linguistically Diverse Country

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Around 180 languages are spoken in India. Thirty-two of those have more than a million speakers, and twenty-two of them are officially "recognized" as major languages. These are not mere dialects but distinct languages with their own scripts. English and French have more in common with each other—a common script, for example, and words with a common root—than many Indian languages do with each other. There is only a 36 percent chance that two Indians selected at random will be able to converse in a common language.

The country's institutions reflect and accommodate the linguistic plurality. One can listen to radio programs in one of 146 languages and read a newspaper in one of thirty-five. Around eighty languages are taught in at least one school. The National Academy of Letters gives out literary awards in twenty-four language categories. Each currency note spells out its denomination in fifteen scripts. Most of the twenty-eight Indian states are demarcated on the basis of language so that speakers of each language group can enjoy a certain level of cultural autonomy and identity.

After Independence, the national leaders aspired to adopt Hindi, a north Indian language spoken by slightly less than half the population, as the sole official language. Many non-Hindi speakers, however, viewed the adoption as a cultural imposition. They refused to learn Hindi and thwarted its aggressive promotion as the lingua franca to replace the language of the old colonial power. English thus survived by default as the language of interstate and federal-state communication, federal judiciary, corporations, and higher education. Given the edge accrued to English speakers in the global economy, most upwardly mobile Indians have shed any misgivings about embracing the colonial remnant. India's English speakers now number 125 million, the largest such pool outside the United States.

India is Religiously Diverse

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About 80 percent of India's 1.3 billion people are Hindus, 14 percent are Muslims, and 2.3 percent are Christians. Smaller religious minorities include Sikhs, Parsees, Jains, and Buddhists. Given India's enormous population, the followers of the minority religions register heavily on the global scale. For example, Indian Muslims outnumber those in all the Middle Eastern countries put together (195 million versus 161 million), and Indian Christians outnumber Canadian ones (28 million versus 23 million).

Despite the Partition with Muslim-majority Pakistan at Independence, the leaders of the new Indian nation decisively rejected the notion of a Hindu state and fashioned a fastidiously secular Constitution. They went out of their way to reassure religious minorities of their place in the new nation by granting them autonomy in matters of personal law. For example, Muslims, but not others, are legally permitted to practice polygamy. Educational institutions run by foundations (or trusts) of minority religions are permitted to give preference to their coreligionists in admissions. Some of the most selective private schools and colleges in India are run by Christian trusts. Social cleavages along religious lines, by some accounts, have deepened over the years. The tension is greatest between Hindus and Muslims, which has sometimes resulted in riots, political violence, and genocide. Politicians advocating a more assertive Hindu identity for India have gained electoral success in recent decades. They have leveraged Hindu grievances, real and imagined, against Muslims. Outside politics, greater comity has prevailed. Muslims and Parsees have founded some of India's most successful multinational corporations. A disproportionately high number of the most popular movie stars and artists are Muslim. India has had a Sikh prime minister (Manmohan Singh), two Muslim presidents (Zakir Hussain and Abdul Kalam), and a Catholic leader of a ruling party (Sonia Gandhi).

A consequence of its large Hindu and Jain populations is that the country is home to the world's largest number of vegetarians (500 million). Though not all Hindus are vegetarians, the practice has had enough of centuries-long critical mass for many of the country's culinary traditions to have grown around it. People outside India adopting vegetarianism for ethical, environmental, or health reasons often turn to Indian recipes for ideas on how to make their diets tasty, filling, and wholesome.

It's Not Just the Land of the Taj Mahal

Author: Coonoor Kripalani writes bilingual books for children (Hindi and English) and is currently researching the role of All India Radio as India's state broadcaster; formerly the Honorary Institute Fellow at the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Hong Kong); she has published articles on Mohandas Gandhi, Hindi film, and an article comparing Indian and Chinese communities in film (included in the book she co-edited, *Indian and Chinese Immigrant Communities: Comparative Perspectives* – London, New York: Anthem Press and Singapore: ISEAS, 2015).

Source: Kripalani, Coonoor. "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century." *Education About Asia* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2020): 13-17.

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-kripalani/>.

The Taj Mahal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the mid-seventeenth-century white marble mausoleum epitomizing Mughal architecture and high art, is perhaps the most well-known of India's heritage sites. But the Taj Mahal is a relatively new construction in a land that was home to a number of remarkable ancient civilizations. Archaeological excavations in Sanghol, Punjab, and in Rakhigarhi, Haryana, as well as in Lothal and Dongavira in Gujarat, Kalibangan, near Bikaner in Rajasthan, and Alamgirpur near Meerut in Uttar Pradesh, have revealed the remains of Harappan civilization sites dating to 5,000 BCE, considered among the world's most ancient civilizations. Remains of stepped wells, drainage systems, well-planned towns, and artifacts found at these sites all indicate the spread of this ancient civilization in the former river basin of the Indus.

The Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra, not far from Aurangabad, are a complex of Buddhist caves built in two phases between the second century BCE and the mid-fifth century. The caves are adorned with sculptures and frescoes, one of the most iconic being that of Padmapani. Stunning interior architecture characterizes the cave temples, which were used as worship halls and monasteries for monsoon retreats of Buddhist monks, as well as rest stops for itinerant merchants and pilgrims. In nearby Ellora, a rock-cut monastery and temple complex (600 to 1000 CE) in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions is the Kailashnath Temple, an unexplained architectural feat that is said to have been carved into the rock from the top down. Over 100 caves at Ellora represent each of the three different religions and were used both for worship and as a travelers' rest stop.

Sanchi Stupa near Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, a Buddhist monument housing relics of the Buddha, was started in the third century BCE. The complex continued to be built and enhanced over the centuries until the twelfth century CE. The relief sculptures of Sanchi reflect Greek influence on the carvings. Sanchi remains an important stop for Buddhist pilgrims.

In addition, numerous Hindu and Islamic archaeological sites such as forts, gardens, palaces, temples, and mosques dating from the earliest of times until the twenty-first century can be seen all around the country.

Storytelling and Retelling

Author: Coonoor Kripalani writes bilingual books for children (Hindi and English) and is currently researching the role of All India Radio as India's state broadcaster; formerly the Honorary Institute Fellow at the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Hong Kong); she has published articles on Mohandas Gandhi, Hindi film, and an article comparing Indian and Chinese communities in film (included in the book she co-edited, *Indian and Chinese Immigrant Communities: Comparative Perspectives* – London, New York: Anthem Press and Singapore: ISEAS, 2015).

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<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-kripalani/>.

India has a marvelous penchant for storytelling and retelling. This probably explains the endurance of the epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, their popularity across the country and across Southeast Asia, as well as the number of versions that exist.

In the case of the *Ramayana*, region, location, and who tells the story are all factors that weigh in the narrative. For many Indians, the narrative by the sage Valmiki is the definitive one, and it is this story that is enacted time and again when India's most famous holiday, Diwali, draws near. Street theater in towns and cities set up for the *Ramlila*, a theatrical production of the story of Ram and Sita. For almost a month before the day, various scenes of the epic tale are played out ... culminating in the slaying of [the villain] Ravana, on Dusshera, ten days before Diwali. This is often marked in a dramatic burning of [an effigy of] Ravana with all his ten heads standing in the center ... It is in the retelling that the excitement lies; audiences cheer the righteous characters and jeer at the villainous ones, knowing exactly what is to come.

In different states, where the telling is in different languages, small variations creep into the story ... Some narratives change the relationship between principal characters. But even more surprisingly, the "villainous" Ravana is venerated in different parts of India as a highly evolved being with powers obtained by his penance and devotion to the gods...

...the retelling of the *Ramayana* in any of its versions is one the nation never seems to tire of. A seventy-eight-episode TV series on the *Ramayana* created in 1987 for the national TV station Doordarshan has been replayed during the COVID-19 lockdown to an appreciative audience, together with B. R. Chopra's 1988 ninety-four-episode series on the *Mahabharata*. Once again, the nation has been happy to revisit these stories.

For many, Ram embodies the ideal Hindu man and Sita the ideal Hindu woman. The two epics together provide the guidelines to living by *dharma* (duty) and the law of karma (actions that dictate spiritual cause and effect), thus framing the code for ethical living...

Narrative Accounts of Indian History are Necessarily Confusing and Misleading

Author: Ainslie Embree was Professor Emeritus of History (Columbia University); formerly President of the American Institute of Indian Studies and of the Association for Asian Studies; he also taught in India from 1948-58 and served in the American Embassy in Delhi; among his many publications are *India's Search for National Identity*, *Imagining India*, and *Religion and Nationalism in India*.

Source: Embree, Ainslie. "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century." *Education About Asia* 08, no. 3 (Winter 2003): 7-11.

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century/>.

The peoples of India have always reflected on their past, their social origins, and their history in ways of fundamental importance for understanding intellectual and social ideas. These ways, however, did not always conform to western—nor, it should be noted, to Chinese or Islamic—historiography. What confused Europeans when they began studying Indian culture—and Indians who used the methodologies of modern European scholarship—was that India's past was a living reality, the past intertwined in the present. The vast body of Indian literature, a modern Indian historian points out, shows how "the variety of structural forms of social relations, the intricacy of their interconnections and the long course of the historical evolution of these forms through social struggle" are stamped on the living beliefs and practices of the people. Their past, the Indian-ness of India, is always palpable to the people of present-day India.

The narrative of Indian history is also confusing because it lacks a political core on which to base a narrative. Seven centuries of invasions and rule by foreigners, with the accounts written by them, made a dispiriting national narrative for generations of Indians. "Whether unintentional or not," a British historian commented, "no greater spiritual injury can be done to a people than to teach them to despise the achievements of their forefathers. To overvalue them can hardly be a mistake." The evaluation of the past was a critical project for modern India, and to a very considerable extent, the Indian nationalist movement involved the appropriation of the Indian past to define the nation, the integration of India's complex, often contradictory, past into a national narrative.

India and the United States

Author: Itty Abraham, Head of the Dept. of Southeast Asian Studies (National University of Singapore); previously at Social Science Research Council (New York) and director of the South Asia Institute (The University of Texas at Austin); most recent book is *How India Became Territorial* (Stanford University Press)

Source: Abraham, Itty. "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century." *Education About Asia* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2020): 5-8.

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-abraham/>.

Moving beyond comparison, while Indians are a common sight in the US today, their presence in large numbers is relatively recent, dating back to the revision of US immigration rules in 1965. But the presence of India in the New World is not new. In the early eighteenth century, a generous donation from the governor of Madras (now Chennai) would lead to the Collegiate School in New Haven being renamed Yale University in honor of its colonial benefactor. The *Smithsonian Magazine* reports that nearly a century later, an elephant was shipped from India to Salem, Massachusetts, and eventually sold in New York City for \$10,000, a staggering amount for the times. These anecdotes remind us of the regular maritime traffic between the northeastern seaboard of the US and India. No small number of Yankee fortunes were built on the East India trade, which included most famously Indian black tea—for those who remember the Boston Tea Party—but also white Massachusetts ice, which was shipped east to cool the fevered brows and sundowner drinks of British officials and Indian princes. In 1913, the Indian Nobel Laureate and poet Rabindranath Tagore spent some months in Urbana–Champaign visiting his son, who was studying agriculture at the University of Illinois. Even before World War I, Indian immigrants and demobilized Indian soldiers of the British Army began to work in the lumberyards and agricultural fields of the western US and Canada. Like other Asians, they struggled against legal restrictions on owning property and obtaining full citizenship due to race-based exclusions. One remarkable story of adaptation concerns Indian men who married Mexican women in the early years of the twentieth century; the oldest community of Punjabi–Mexican–Americans is said to be found in Yuba City, California. Similar stories of adaptation can be found on the East Coast as well, dating from the same time. Bengali-speaking merchants and sailors who jumped ship found sanctuary with Puerto Rican and African–American communities in large cities such as New York and Detroit, and as far south as New Orleans, creating novel and hybrid legacies for the present that one scholar has called Bengali Harlem.

Today, US Vice President Elect Senator Kamala Harris traces her name and origins to a mother from Chennai and a father from Jamaica. Her heritage sounds unusual, even exotic, but it isn't really when seen in the larger context of the long history of relations between the US and India, for now the world's oldest and largest democracies.

India's Movies are a Popular Export

Author: Nimish Adhia is an Associate Professor of Economics (Manhattanville College, Purchase, NY), is on the Editorial Board of *Education About Asia*, serves as a Series Editor for SAGE Publishing Economic History Case Studies, and is a Visiting Faculty Member at the Indian School of Public Policy (New Delhi). Paavi Kulshreshth (graduate of University of Delhi journalism program) and Ishaan Sethi (Teach for India alumnus and TATA Trusts Development Consultant), both graduate students at the Indian School of Public Policy, are co-authors.

Source: Adhia, Nimish, Paavi Kulshreshth, and Ishaan Sethi. "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century." *Education About Asia* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2020): 9-12.

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-adhia-kulshreshth-sethi/>.

Indian commercial feature films beat yoga and chicken tikka masala in popularity outside of India. A distinctive feature of Indian films is that they are punctuated by short intervals of song and dance, often lavishly choreographed, in a dreamlike sequence, and tangentially related to the storyline. Some song and dance sequences become famous in their own right and enjoy a cachet in the popular culture independent of the film they appeared in...

Though Westerners have not gravitated to Indian films in huge numbers, audiences in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have. The recurrent themes of tradition versus modernity, individuality versus community, etc., resonate more deeply with audiences in other similarly and rapidly modernizing societies. The global viewership of Indian films is second only to that of Hollywood. While Hollywood produces around 200 films a year, India produces around 1,000. Keeping with the country's linguistic diversity, the films are produced in around thirty languages. The Hindi-language film industry (nicknamed Bollywood) bags the biggest box office share.

The popularity of Indian films abroad gives India quite a bit of soft power. The films cultivate a taste abroad for Indian fashion, arts, and culture. Pakistanis are eager consumers of Indian movies, which are one of the few things that make it through the tightly sealed India-Pakistan border. After the decade-long Taliban regime fell, among the first things Afghans did was exchange pictures of Indian movie stars. In the 1950s, from behind the Iron Curtain, Russian audiences had so warmed towards Indian films that the name Raj—after the Hindi filmmaker Raj Kapoor—was common among Russian newborns. Today, one can find on YouTube homemade videos of Africans, Chinese, Central Asians, and Middle Easterners who do not speak Hindi mimic beautifully their favorite Hindi movie songs.

Plentiful representation from religious minorities in the films—indeed, for a decade at the turn of the century, the three male leads with the biggest box office draw were all Muslim—gives some credence to the country's claim to being inclusive and tolerant. The movies often portray the travails of religious minorities sympathetically. They also convey other liberal and progressive sensibilities, such as gender equality and, more recently, LGBT equality. Many audiences experiencing oppression elsewhere, therefore, see India as a shining city on the hill.

Women in Science and Medicine

Author: Coonoor Kripalani writes bilingual books for children (Hindi and English) and is currently researching the role of All India Radio as India's state broadcaster; formerly the Honorary Institute Fellow at the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Hong Kong); she has published articles on Mohandas Gandhi, Hindi film, and an article comparing Indian and Chinese communities in film (included in the book she co-edited, *Indian and Chinese Immigrant Communities: Comparative Perspectives* – London, New York: Anthem Press and Singapore: ISEAS, 2015).

Source: Kripalani, Coonoor. "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century." *Education About Asia* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2020): 13-17.

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-kripalani/>.

In 2019, when ISRO's (Indian Space Research Organization) second spacecraft—*Chandrayaan-2*—lifted off to the moon, images of the charged atmosphere at the space station revealed a number of sari-clad women scientists. They were senior scientists in charge of the mission, most of whom had also worked on the Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) of 2013. Role models for girls in STEM, they comprise a fraction of the 20 to 25 percent of women employees of ISRO's total of 16,000...

Fighting traditional biases, Indian women entered the field of medicine as early as 1886, when Dr. Anandibai Joshi graduated as India's first woman doctor from Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania in the USA. Dr. Kadambini Ganguly began medical studies in 1886 in India, completing her specializations in 1893 in the UK. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy graduated from Madras Medical College in 1912, but subsequently became a social reformer and women's activist. These precedents led to other women entering the medical field in the 1920s to 1940s, thus establishing a shift away from midwives delivering babies to women doctors.

In 1939, when she visited Mahatma Gandhi, young Dr. Sushila Nayyar handled a cholera outbreak in Wardha singlehandedly. After this, she was appointed the personal physician to Gandhi. She fought for freedom shoulder to shoulder with the Mahatma. Another well-known freedom fighter is Dr. Lakshmi Sahgal, who—while tending to the war-wounded soldiers in Singapore—joined the Indian National Army (that allied with the Japanese against the British in 1943) as head of the women's brigade, a revolutionary concept.

All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) was established under the auspices of Health Minister Kumari Amrit Kaur in 1952, one of fifteen women of the Constituent Assembly that oversaw the drafting of the National Constitution. Kaur also founded the Tuberculosis Association of India, the Leprosy and Research Institute, the League of Red Cross Societies, and other health care bodies.

Digital Nation

Author: Coonor Kripalani writes bilingual books for children (Hindi and English) and is currently researching the role of All India Radio as India's state broadcaster; formerly the Honorary Institute Fellow at the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Hong Kong); she has published articles on Mohandas Gandhi, Hindi film, and an article comparing Indian and Chinese communities in film (included in the book she co-edited, *Indian and Chinese Immigrant Communities: Comparative Perspectives* – London, New York: Anthem Press and Singapore: ISEAS, 2015).

Source: Kripalani, Coonor. "Top Ten Things to Know About India in the Twenty-First Century." *Education About Asia* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2020): 13-17.

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-kripalani/>.

India is one of the largest suppliers of global digital services, earning the country approximately US \$191 billion in revenues. Among the major companies are Accenture PLC, HCL Technologies Ltd., International Business Machines Corp., Infosys Ltd., Serco Group PLC, Tata Consultancy Services Ltd., Tech Mahindra Ltd., and Wipro Ltd. The industry is one of the biggest employers in the country, producing both hardware and software. Bengaluru in south India is the Silicon Valley of India, home to spanking-clean campus-like premises of various IT companies and the headquarters of Infosys.

The industry accounts for 45 percent of India's service exports. Operating in about eighty countries, India's IT industry is expected to increase to US \$266.46 billion by 2024.

Domestically, the Modi government has given a big push to introduce a cashless digital economy through various measures, particularly payment apps like PayTM. The Aadhaar card is a national identity card that gives every citizen access to essential services, as well as food rations at controlled prices. A separate PAN card is required of those availing banking services.

India's Economy is Booming Like Few Others

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<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-adhia-kulshreshth-sethi/>.

The swarm of construction cranes jutting into the sky over Indian cities leaves no doubt that the country is in the midst of an economic boom. The change in the economic growth rates—plotted in Figure 1— is of great significance. The growth rate of the 1960s and 1970s (3 percent aggregate and 1 percent per capita) marked an improvement over the economic performance in the first half of the twentieth century under colonial rule, when per capita income “grew” at the unimpressive rate of 0 percent. But the improvement was not sufficient to increase dramatically the low standard of living of the average Indian. At that rate, the average income would have doubled only every seventy-two years. Some commentators at the time dubbed the growth rate of the time the “Hindu rate of growth,” alluding to the common conception of Hindus as being fatalistically resigned to accepting their lot in life. In the 1980s and 1990s, the growth rate boomed as a result of economic reforms. The average Indian could hope to double his standard of living every twenty years. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the growth rate accelerated further, ranking below only that of China’s breakneck pace. The average Indian can now expect to double his income every thirteen years, amounting in a fivefold increase over the span of a generation!

The middle and upper classes have most obviously benefited from the boom. The glitzy skyscrapers, malls, and airports in India’s cities can attest to that. But the poor have benefited, too. As Figure 2 shows, the percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (an international poverty line) has fallen steadily from 60 percent in 1977 to 20 percent in 2011. Outside of China, never have so many people been lifted above subsistence level so rapidly.

But it is one thing to leave behind the subsistence level and another to become solidly middle class. The path upward to the 300 million-strong middle class—making up only one-fourth of the population—remains narrow. Despite the boom, jobs in the formal economy, which comprise the most common gateway to the middle class, are not rising fast enough to absorb all—or even most—aspirants. A substantial percentage of previously poor find themselves stuck toiling as casual workers, shopkeepers, or peddlers in the informal economy. The coronavirus recession is highlighting their economic precarity.

The Indian Economy is Part Silicon Valley, Part Dickensian England

Author: Nimish Adhia is an Associate Professor of Economics (Manhattanville College, Purchase, NY), is on the Editorial Board of *Education About Asia*, serves as a Series Editor for SAGE Publishing Economic History Case Studies, and is a Visiting Faculty Member at the Indian School of Public Policy (New Delhi). Paavi Kulshreshth (graduate of University of Delhi journalism program) and Ishaan Sethi (Teach for India alumnus and TATA Trusts Development Consultant), both graduate students at the Indian School of Public Policy, are co-authors.

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In cities such as Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Gurugram, many young Indians working for Amazon or Google (as well as homegrown companies such as Infosys and Wipro) stroll in office parks not unlike the ones in California. In between designing algorithms, coding, and playing "team building" rounds of foosball, many twenty-something, highly-educated techies in designer *kurtas* lounge about on their brightly colored funky furniture with a cup of freshly brewed *masala chai* in hand. They dream of their own venture capital-funded startups that would use machine learning to perform a range of tasks from detecting cancer early to getting more Americans to click on ads. They represent, at most, 2–3 percent of the population.

From here, one can travel to a slum ten kilometers (6.2 miles) away or a village 100 kilometers (62 miles) away and feel like one has arrived in nineteenth-century. Comprising around 50 percent of the country's population, the people living here use lanterns, and there is no running water. People defecate in the open sewage that runs next to their shacks, which are constructed by stretching plastic tarps over poles. Naked children frolic around on a garbage dump. Tuberculosis and leprosy—eliminated from many other parts of the world—leave the people here unfazed. People perform dangerous work in the fields or workshops with no personal protective equipment, or even shoes. Women squint and cough as they hunch over the smoke from their stoves burning dried cow dung cakes as fuel. Only the cellphones—that seem to have miraculously made their way into many such households where even indoor plumbing and electricity haven't—hint at the twenty-first century.

Digital Nation

Author: Coonoor Kripalani writes bilingual books for children (Hindi and English) and is currently researching the role of All India Radio as India's state broadcaster; formerly the Honorary Institute Fellow at the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Hong Kong); she has published articles on Mohandas Gandhi, Hindi film, and an article comparing Indian and Chinese communities in film (included in the book she co-edited, *Indian and Chinese Immigrant Communities: Comparative Perspectives* – London, New York: Anthem Press and Singapore: ISEAS, 2015).

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<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/top-ten-things-to-know-about-india-in-the-twenty-first-century-kripalani/>.

Indian handicrafts ... contribute just short of one-fourth of India's total exports. This is a remarkable achievement considering that colonial rule reduced India's share of the world economy from 23 percent in the eighteenth century to 3 percent by the time it ended in 1947. Famed worldwide, Indian textiles comprised 25 percent of global trade in textiles in the eighteenth century, clothing the world in both East and West, before draconian policies privileging British goods over Indian ones decimated India's textile industry.

This is why Gandhi's act of spinning cotton yarn and wearing *khadi*, cloth made of hand-spun cotton, was an act of political defiance. Yet despite the British impoverishment of artisans and weavers, lineages of these traditional occupations were somehow revived in postcolonial India, which today boasts a rich heritage not only in handloom textiles, but in a great number of other handicrafts.

The chief impetus for the revival of India's handicrafts came from the titan Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. A freedom fighter in the nationalist struggle, Chattopadhyay was the champion of rural workers, particularly women. To ensure the inclusion, dignity, and relevance of rural labor to the rapidly industrializing economy, she worked tirelessly to rehabilitate India's traditional handicrafts (as well as performing arts and theatre). To this end, she established institutions in Delhi to safeguard these aspects of cultural heritage...

Among the many crafts that have been revived and found their place in the economy are metallurgy, woodworking, textile weaving, basketry, embroidery, Sanjhi (paper cutting), folk painting of various styles, papermaking, stone inlay in marble, pottery, ceramics, and many others. Today, it is the pride of city elites to wear saris and clothes made of handloom materials, woven and embellished with special designs from different parts of the country. High-fashion designers also use these materials in their contemporary design creations. Handcrafted decorative products are typically used in homes in towns and villages. As few handcrafted products can compete with the functionality of machine-made goods, they remain niche products domestically. Yet both domestically and as export products, handicrafts have realized the dream of the early champions of the industry: to make these master craftsmen and artisans a recognized pillar of India's economy.

Relevant Washington State Standards

*Note: This lesson is an introduction to the below themes, which will be further explored in this course

SSS1.9-12.3 Explain points of agreement and disagreement that experts have regarding interpretations of sources.

SSS1.9-12.4 Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

C2.9-10.1 Explain how citizens and institutions address social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and international level.

C3.11-12.1 Evaluate the impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, and international agreements on the maintenance of national and international order or disorder.

C4.11-12.4 Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.

E1.11-12.3 Analyze how economic choices made by groups and individuals in the global economy can impose costs and provide benefits.

E2.9-10.3 Analyze how and why countries have specialized in the production of particular goods and services in the past or present.

E2.9-10.4 Analyze the relationship between the distribution of income and the allocation of resources in a variety of economies.

E2.11-12.4 Evaluate the advantages, disadvantages, and stability of different economic systems for countries and groups of people, both short and long term.

E2.11-12.7 Evaluate the relationship between the distribution of income and the allocation of resources in a variety of economies.

E3.9-10.1 Analyze the costs and benefits of government trade policies from around the world in the past and present.

E3.9-10.2 Explain the role of government in advancing technology and investing in capital goods and human capital to increase economic growth and standards of living.

E4.9-10.1 Evaluate how people across the world have addressed issues involved with the distribution of resources and sustainability.

E4.11-12.5 Explain how current globalization trends and policies affect economic growth, labor markets, rights of citizens, the environment, and resource and income distribution in different nations.

G2.11-12.6 Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

G3.9-10.1 Define how the geography of expansion and encounter have shaped global politics and economics in history.

H3.11-12.7 Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.

H4.11-12.3 Analyze how current events today are rooted in past events.