

**BC2859
SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORAS
SPRING 2025**

M/W 2:40PM- 3:55PM

Instructor: Maia Ramnath

Course Objectives:

This survey focuses on the South Asian diaspora, that is, the migration of people originating from the Indian subcontinent into a global horizon, and the multi-dimensional array of economic, political and cultural relationships produced between diasporic communities, their places of origin, and their places of arrival.

Given that a thorough chronological coverage of such a large spatial and temporal scope would be unrealistic, the course will be structured around key themes and questions in the history of the diaspora, using these as entry points into deeper contexts while making connections between historical and contemporary phenomena. We will explore flows of labor (indentured and otherwise), transnational mercantile and financial connections, overseas political movements, and South Asian communities in North America and the UK.

Topics will include: questions of bondage and contract, circulation of revolutionary praxis and radical cross-fertilization, racial and cultural identity formation, legal and extralegal economies, gender, class and caste. Does a diasporic perspective reinforce or transcend the boundaries of the nation? Does a diasporic context replicate or transform social categories? How does a diaspora function within global economies and political frameworks?

Our readings will draw upon literary texts, oral and public histories, as well as archival sources; not to mention observations from your own forays into the city.

Requirements:

--Attendance & participation, 20% (includes weekly discussion contributions and your in-class presentation linked to paper #2)

--Response paper #1, 25% (900-1200 words, critically responding to readings, primed by discussions)

--Response paper #2, 25% (900-1200 words, linking themes of readings and discussions to observations drawn from something outside the classroom, such as a neighborhood visit, local business, local place of worship if appropriate, cultural event, art exhibit, organization, union, political campaign, etc.)

--Final exam, 30%

Dates to be aware of:

--Paper #1 due by 5:00 on Feb. 26

--Paper #2 due by 5:00 on Apr. 23

--Final exam [TBD]

Learning Objectives:

This course will familiarize students with major debates around questions in the study of diaspora and migration while providing a sense of their interlinkages with large scale socio-political processes such as the globalization of labor, the formation of social hierarchies, as well as movements for survival and belonging.

Students who complete this course will learn how to:

- 1) Use and evaluate primary materials through critical reading and interpretation
- 2) Conduct close readings of key texts in multimedia formats (posters and ephemera, digital archives, art and cultural production, manifestos, etc.)
- 3) Evaluate divergent perspectives and representations by combining historical accounts with memory and personal narratives
- 4) Adopt methods of public outreach and neighborhood ethnography to understand the imprint of the past on the present
- 5) Present arguments cogently and logically in writing and speaking, including through collaborative learning and presentation

Grading Scale:

97-100: A+

93-96: A

89-92: A-

85-88: B+

81-84: B

77-80: B-

73-76: C+

69-72: C

65-68: C-

61-64: D

Academic integrity

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Plagiarism or dishonesty and unethical behavior is unacceptable and you will face punitive measures. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Barnard, or Columbia.

Honor Code

Established 1912; updated 2016.

We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by engaging with integrity in all of our academic pursuits. We affirm that academic integrity is the honorable creation and presentation of our own work. We acknowledge that it is our responsibility to seek clarification of proper forms of collaboration and use of academic resources in all assignments or exams. We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic, or other academic resources. We will respect the rights of others to engage in pursuit of learning in order to uphold our commitment to honor. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.

Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS) Statement

If you anticipate barriers to your academic experience due to a documented disability or emerging health challenge, please contact your instructor and/or the Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS) as early as possible. If you have questions regarding registering a disability or receiving accommodations for the semester, contact CARDS at (212) 854-4634 or cards@barnard.edu (or for Columbia students, disability@columbia.edu). You can learn more about on-campus support at barnard.edu/disability-services. CARDS is located in 101 Altschul Hall.

Wellness Statement

It is important for you as undergraduates to recognize and identify the different pressures, burdens, and stressors you may be facing, whether personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic. As a community, we urge you to prioritize yourself—your health, sanity, and wellness—throughout your career on campus. Sleep, exercise, and eating well are all part of a healthy regimen to cope with stress. Resources exist to support you, and we encourage you to make use of them. Should you have any questions about navigating these resources, please visit these sites:

<http://barnard.edu/primarycare>

<https://barnard.edu/about-counseling>

<https://barnard.edu/TheWellnessSpot/about>

Texts and Readings:

The following books will be on order, and on reserve at the library.

Coolie Woman by Gaiutra Bahadur

Migritude by Shailja Patel

Texts marked with an asterisk [*] will be posted on Courseworks.

Links for publicly available online content are included in the syllabus.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

Week 1 (Jan 22): Introduction

Learning Objectives: defining diaspora, defining South Asia, identifying themes and questions, overview of structure/organization, introducing assignments and methodologies

Readings:

Jan 22

*--Introduction by Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook from *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, pp. 1-10

--"Barnard's New Non-Discrimination Caste Policy" (<https://history.barnard.edu/news/barnards-new-nondiscrimination-caste-policy>) [feel free to explore links for an introduction to more resources and information!]

[--1-2 current news articles TBD regarding prominent South Asian Americans in politics, business and culture]

Week 2 (Jan 27, 29): Labor Flows Today

Learning Objectives: labor diasporas today; South Asian workers in West Asia and the US

Readings:

Jan 27

*--Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora*, pp. 97-152

Jan 29

--Desis Rising Up and Moving, "Workers' Rights are Human Rights: South Asian Immigrant Workers in New York City" pp. 1-22 (<https://www.drumnyc.org/wp-content/themes/wpaid/images/wc-report.pdf>)

--Sana Khan, "Mohammed and Ali's Magazine Mecca" in AAWW's *Open Cities* (<https://aaww.org/the-magazine-mecca-of-mohammed-and-ali/>)

--Sophia Tareen, "The Hands That Feed You" in AAWW's *Open Cities* (<https://aaww.org/the-hands-that-feed-you/>)

In class:

-- Gulf Labour statements (<https://gulflabour.org/>)

-- New York Taxi Workers Alliance materials: mission and history, campaigns and issues (<https://www.nytw.org>)

During the week: VISIT JACKSON HEIGHTS

Week 3 (Feb 3,5): Flows of Indenture 1

Learning Objectives: historical context of slavery and indenture, geography of indenture, the girmitiya system

Readings:

Feb 3

--Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman* pp. 3-74

Feb 5

*--Radhika Mongia, "The Migration of 'Free' Labor: Contracting Freedom" in *Indian Migration and Empire*, pp. 22-55

*--Rachel Sturman, "Indian Indentured Labor and the History of International Rights Regimes," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 119, Issue 5, December 2014, pp. 1439–1465

In class:

--oral histories, <https://girmitiya.girmit.org>

Week 4 (Feb 10, 12): Flows of Indenture 2

Learning Objectives: social and cultural shifts among migrants; emergence of new communities; linking labor struggles and anticolonial politics

Readings:

Feb 10

--Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman* pp. 75-162

Feb 12

--Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman* pp. 163-214

--Satnarine Balkaransingh, "100 Years After Indenture: The Present Generation of Indo-Trinidadians and their Cultural Environment" in *Girmitiyas and the Global Indian Diaspora*, pp. 157-175

In class:

--browse "everything slackens in a wreck" exhibition (<https://www.fordfoundation.org/about/the-ford-foundation-center-for-social-justice/ford-foundation-gallery/exhibitions/everything-slackens-in-a-wreck/>)

During the week: VISIT RICHMOND HILL

Week 5 (Feb 17, 19): Out of Africa

Learning Objectives: expulsion of South Asians from Kenya and Uganda (double diaspora)

Readings:

Feb 17

--Shailja Patel, *Migritude* pp. 3-70

*--Mahmood Mamdani, "The Ugandan Asian Expulsion, Twenty Years After" *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 6, Issue 3, 1993, pp. 265–273

Feb 19

-- Shailja Patel, *Migritude* pp. 73-124

--Mahmood Mamdani, "The Asian Question," 50 years after, *London Review of Books* Vol. 44 No. 19 (6 October 2022) pp. 1-8

(<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v44/n19/mahmood-mamdani/the-asian-question>)

Week 6 (Feb 24, 26) Into Africa

Learning Objectives: background on Indian Ocean world, commercial/financial networks, transnational trading communities; South Asians in South Africa; siddis in South Asia; Gandhi's early career in South Africa

Readings:

Feb 24

*--David Washbrook, "The World of the Indian Ocean" in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, pp. 13-22

*--Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya* pp. 71-117

Feb 26

*--Isabel Hofmeyr, "Seeking Empire, Finding Nation: Gandhi and Indianness in South Africa" in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, pp. 153-165

*--Goolam Vahed, "Negotiating Power in Colonial Natal," in *Beyond Indenture: Agency and Resistance in the Colonial South Asian Diaspora*, ed. Crispin Bates, pp. 19-37

*--Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai, "Rooting History: Indian Indenture in South Africa and The Sultan of Many Journeys," *Girmitiyas and the Global Indian Diaspora*, ed. Ashutosh Kumar and Crispin Bates, pp. 225-253

--Fatima Meer, "Indian South Africans--the Struggle to be South African"

(<https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/031v02424/041v03275/051v03336/061v03344/071v03346.htm>)

In class:

--materials from South African History Online (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/indian-south-africans>)

RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE BY 5:00 ON FEB 26

Week 7 (Mar 3,5): At War With the British Empire

Learning Objectives: precolonial and colonial military labor markets, India's role as sub-imperial center, Indian soldiers in the British Army during WW1 and WW2, WW1 as political catalyst

Readings:

Mar 3

*--Santanu Das, "Their Lives Have Become Ours: Counter-Encounters in Mesopotamia 1915-18" in *Militarized Cultural Encounters in the Long Nineteenth Century*, pp. 171-194

Mar 5

*--Mulk Raj Anand, *Across the Black Waters* (pp. 7-57)

In class:

--letters from soldiers (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/letters-first-world-war-1915/>,

<https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2015/09/letters-from-indian-soldiers-26-september-1915.html>)

Week 8 (Mar 10, 12) Legacies of Ghadar

Learning Objectives: colonial regulation of migration, evolving politics among soldiers, mutinies overseas, the Komagata Maru, the Ghadar movement, immigration and naturalization in the US and Canada, Punjabis on the West Coast, political trajectories of Ghadar afterlives (to be continued...)

Readings:

Mar 10

*--Radhika Mongia, "Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport" in *Indian Immigration and Empire*, pp. 112-140

*--Chhanda Chatterjee, "Toilers Across the Seas: Racial Discrimination and Political Assertion Among Sikhs in Canada" in *Beyond Indenture: Agency and Resistance in the Colonial South Asian Diaspora*, pp. 100-126

Mar 12

*--SAADA, *Our Stories: An Introduction to South Asian America* pp. 3-48

--Ali Mir, Bushra Rehman, Purvi Shah, and Syed Mohammed Shahed, "Songs of Revolt" in AAWW's *The Margins* (<https://aaww.org/ghadar-songs-of-revolt/>)

--J. Daniel Elam, "Echoes of Mutiny" in AAWW's *The Margins* (<https://aaww.org/ghadr-party-echoes/>)

--Sonny Singh, "Looking Back at Sikh Resistance" in AAWW's *The Margins* <https://aaww.org/looking-back-sikh-resistance/>

Film: *Continuous Journey*

SIGN UP FOR PRESENTATION SLOTS
(presentations to occur during weeks 9-13)

SPRING BREAK (Mar 17-21) NO CLASSES

Week 9 (Mar 24, 26) Anti-Imperialism Abroad (Between Wars, Between World Systems)

Learning Objectives: continuing legacies of Ghadar, MN Roy and Radical Humanism, Amir Hyder Khan; travel, cosmopolitanism and universalism; class and anticolonial politics in transnational contexts, the Progressive Writers in London, Indian Workers Association, changeover from British Empire to Cold War world order after WW2, decolonization [and non-alignment and afro-asian solidarity frames]

Readings:

Mar 24

*--Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, pp. 94-159

*--Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* pp.63-97

Mar 26

*--Sajjad Zaheer, *A Night in London* pp. 1-60, plus PWA manifesto

In class:

--materials from Connecting Histories,
Sarah Dar, "The Indian Workers Association" in *Campaigning for Social Justice*

(https://connectinghistories.org.uk/static/Learning%20Packages/Social%20Justice/social_justice_lp_02.htm)

including sections

--"The IWA and Anti-Racism"

(https://connectinghistories.org.uk/static/Learning%20Packages/Social%20Justice/social_justice_lp_02a.htm)

-- "Equality and Employment"

(https://connectinghistories.org.uk/static/Learning%20Packages/Social%20Justice/social_justice_lp_02b.htm)

--"Welfare and Other Activities"

(https://connectinghistories.org.uk/static/Learning%20Packages/Social%20Justice/social_justice_lp_02c.htm)

Week 10 (Mar 31, Apr 2): South Asians in Canada

Learning Objectives: differences between immigration to Canada or US, politics of Tamil and Sikh diasporas (and the Indian government), interactions of immigrant and indigenous issues

Readings:

Mar 31

--Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*, pp. 1-15

--Harsha Walia, *Border and Rule*, pp. 19-37, 155-166

Apr 2

--Ali Kazimi, "Did Indigenous paddlers smuggle food to the Komagata Maru?"

(<https://theconversation.com/did-indigenous-paddlers-smuggle-food-to-the-komagata-maru-123076>)

--Ali Kazimi, "Nep Sidhu's art stirs controversy about the history of Sikh separatism"

<https://theconversation.com/nep-sidhus-art-stirs-controversy-about-the-history-of-sikh-separatism-118590>

--"Mark Juergensmeyer, "Why India fears the Khalistan movement and how Canada became embroiled in diplomatic spat over killing of Sikh separatist" (<https://theconversation.com/why-india-fears-the-khalistan-movement-and-how-canada-became-embroiled-in-diplomatic-spat-over-killing-of-sikh-separatist-213960>)

--Norimitsu Onishi, "In Canadian Hinterland, Indians Find Land of Opportunity"

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/23/world/americas/canada-northern-college-indian-students.html>

In class:

--current articles TBD (from The Conversation, Rungh, New York Times)

Week 11 (Mar Apr 7,9): Ambedkar in America

Learning Objectives: Ambedkar's presence at Columbia and in Harlem, correspondence with W.E.B. DuBois and Jane Addams, race and caste; contemporary connections: caste and gender politics in the diaspora today

Readings:

Apr 7

*--Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, pp. 160-188 [optional pp. 215-229]

*--Daniel Immerwahr, "Caste or Colony? Indianizing Race in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History*, 4, 2 (2007), pp. 275–301

Apr 9

*--Anupama Rao, "Ambedkar in America: An Archive for Our Times," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol 45 issue 2, 2022, pp. 250-271

--Manan Desai, "What B.R. Ambedkar Wrote to W.E.B. Du Bois,"

(<https://www.saada.org/tides/article/ambedkar-du-bois>)

*--Suraj Yengde, "Iterations of Shared Dalit-Black Solidarity," Seminar #373, January 2021, pp. 1-20

In class:

--resources from Ambedkar Initiative (<https://icls.columbia.edu/initiatives/ambedkar-initiative/>)

During the week: VISIT HARLEM

Week 12 (Apr 14, 16): South Asians in Britain After Empire

Learning Objectives: racial politics in the UK post-empire, the Windrush generation, Black and Asian communities in the British context, Asian Underground culture

Readings:

Apr 14

*--Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* pp. 3-61, 125-181

Apr 16

--"Commemorating Altab Ali Day: Against Racism and Fascism" pp. 1-12

(<http://www.altabalifoundation.org.uk/documents/pamphlets/Altab-Ali-day.pdf>)

--"Brick Lane 1978: The Events and their Significance" pp. 1-25

(<http://www.altabalifoundation.org.uk/documents/pamphlets/Brick-Lane-1978.pdf>)

In class:

--oral histories and documents (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-histories/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-histories-accessible-version/#Topic%20sites>)

--materials from Altab Ali Foundation (<http://www.altabalifoundation.org.uk/documents/articles>)

--materials (including music and audio) from <https://www.fourcornersfilm.co.uk/blog/brick-lane-1978-window-exhibition>

Film: *Bhaji on the Beach* excerpt and/or *We Are Lady Parts* episode

Music: Asian Dub Foundation feat. A. Sivanandan

Week 13 (Apr 21, 23) : South Asians in the US after 1965

Learning Objectives: South Asians in the US after the 1965 immigration law; differential experiences of South Asians of different national origin, religion, caste, class; location in relation to the US racial and political landscape; politics in the diaspora (US and subcontinental), cultural and social life of South Asian communities in NYC; after 9/11

Readings:

Apr 21

*--Sangay Mishra, *Desis Divided* pp. 1-18, 207-219

*--Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslims* pp. 50-73

Apr 23

*--SAADA, *Our Stories* pp. 91-145

In class:

--materials from DRUM (<https://www.drumnyc.org>)

--materials from Sakhi (<https://www.sakhi.org>),

--materials from Equality Labs (www.equalitylabs.org)

Music: Basement Bhangra, Brooklyn Raga Massive, Red Baraat, Arooj Aftab, Zeshan B, Das Racist...

RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE BY 5:00 ON APR 23

(you may hand your paper in at any point after your presentation, prior to this date)

Week 14 (Apr 28, 30): wrap-ups, discussion, synthesis, questions, review