

INDIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Course Description

Indian Autobiography takes a close look at autobiographical writing from authors in India, and it examines writers who have been considered seminal figures in the history of ideas and thought, as well as those writing from marginalized vantage points. Further, the narratives explore evolving senses of identity within a framework of changing geographical, economic, literary, and political contexts.

About the Professor

This course was prepared by Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D., research associate / research fellow, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, Department of Languages and Cultures of South Asia.

Contents

Overview

Early Autobiography

Parasidas

Mahomet

Literary Lives

Chaudhuri

Narayan

Marginal Lives

Muli

Viramma

Political Lives

Gandhi

Nehru

Women's Lives

Phoolan

Research paper

Readings

Recommended Reading

Unit I Writing the Self in India: An Overview

Week 1

Introduction

India, it is often claimed, is a collective society with little sense of individualism, interiority or the self. The rich tradition of autobiographical writings by Indians, in English and Indian languages, suggests that this is a simplified view of a complex culture. Indian literary self-representations will, however, differ from European (or African or Japanese) ones because they reflect local cultural values and social norms. The alignment of the individual to groups, such as extended family, caste, religion, region and nation, is a key feature of Indian autobiographies. Understanding this network of criss-crossing and shifting identities will be an ongoing task in studying these texts. Gender, too, is crucial since a woman's place in traditional Indian society is rigidly defined but is also changing. Another revealing feature of Indian autobiographies is their variety of narrative forms, including letters memoirs, confessions, fiction and oral texts. Finally, we will look carefully at the audiences the writers had in mind when writing their autobiographies and what they hoped to achieve by writing them.

Themes

self v collective in India; significance and forms of autobiographical writing in India

Essay Questions

1. What types of life-histories have been written by Indians and how do they differ from western types?
2. What is the relation of autobiography to history?
- 3 How does autobiography differ from memory?

Readings

Arnold and Blackburn, *Telling Lives in India*, pp. 1-28

Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, pp.1-126

Supplemental Readings

Arnold and Blackburn, *Telling Lives in India*, pp. 203-226.

Anderson, *Autobiography*, pp.1-16

Mines, *Public Faces, Private Voices*, pp. 1-23

Hansen, *Stages of Life*, pp. 26-33, 300- 314

Unit II Early Indian Autobiography : A Merchant's and a Soldier's Life

The two books in this unit are among the earliest autographical writings by Indians. Although they are very different, not least because they were written 150 years apart, together they represent the beginnings of a genre in Indian literary tradition. Neither the merchant nor the soldier uses the first-person narration, but each breaks new ground in writing his life-story, one in Hindi during the Mughal Empire and one in English during the colonial period. Both books present to the reader a vivid portrait of a single man, which was a new departure in Indian writing.

Week 2 Banarasidas

Introduction

When Banarasidas sat down to write his life-story in 1641, he had no examples to imitate and no template to follow. His was to be the very first autobiographical writing in an Indian language. The memoirs written a century earlier by Mughal emperors were in Persian, not an 'Indian' language. Though this claim is contentious, it is clear that Banarasidas did not have access to those earlier autobiographical writings. As Rupert Snell observed in his Preface to this text, Indian 'literary tradition... rarely thought in terms of personal histories.'

The author was clearly a remarkable man. Unsurprisingly, as a poet and scholar, he wrote in verse. As a Jain merchant and a philosophical man, he takes account of his failings and ascribes much to karma, the law of cause and effect. Although he writes of himself in the third person, his 'Half a Story' is autobiographical in that it attempts to understand the human condition through personal experiences. His skilful interweaving of the domestic sphere with the social, commercial, religious and political worlds of his time reveals his hard-earned views on greed, death, passion, ambition and the pursuit of truth. The idiomatic translation brings the reader very close to the events that produced these reflections and tells a cracking good story as well.

Themes

audience and motive; narrative point of view

Essay Questions

- 1 Who is the author's intended audience and what is his motive in writing this story?
- 2 Does the author's use of the third-person limit or deepen the reader's insight into his feelings and reactions?
- 3 Some scholars have claimed that this text is a 'confession.' Do you agree?

Readings

Ardhakathanak (A Half Story)

Recommended Readings

Robinson, *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of India*, pp. 99-107

Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, pp.14-28

Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, pp. 27-37

Snell, 'Confessions of a 17th-century Jain merchant'

Das Gupta, 'Situating the Individual in Medieval India'

Week 3 Mahomed, Dean

Introduction

The British gained a foothold in India as merchants during the 17th century (when Banarasidas was writing his autobiography), though they were largely confined to port cities. By the mid-18th century, however, they had militarily conquered large parts of the subcontinent, including the rich province of Bengal. But the British (in the form of the East India Company) were not only army roaming around Bengal at this time, and small wars were fought between Indian rajas, both Hindu and Muslim, the Dutch, the French and the East India Company. Most soldiers, both European and Indian, were mercenaries, who attached themselves to whoever paid them. Regiments crisscrossed the countryside, moving from camp to camp, campaign to campaign, from local ruler to colonial power. In this volatile and chaotic India, some local people found opportunities. One of these was Dean Mahomed (or Mahomet), who served in the East India Company's army as a camp-follower and officer, emigrated to Ireland, married an Anglo-Irish woman and finally settled in England, where his medical therapies became popular with the British royal family.

Published in Ireland in 1794, Dean Mahomed's story is probably the first autobiographical writing by an Indian in English. Presenting a young man's life as a soldier in north India in the form of letters to an imagined friend, it offers an unparalleled picture of this dramatic period of Indian history through the eyes of one individual. Since Dean Mahomed rarely speaks of himself, we might think of his book as a 'memoir.' The 100 or so pages, which are filled with descriptions of camps, manoeuvres, towns and garrisons, also resemble a travelogue. While in its recording of cultural customs, it approaches ethnography. Although its style is not engrossing, the attention to detail and the self-confessed desire of the author to 'acquaint' Europeans with his early life has produced a powerful portrait. The reader is able to visualise India more than two hundred years ago, through the eyes of a young Muslim man.

Themes

colonialism; identity; narrative form

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the influence of colonialism on this text. How, for example, does it affect the author's motives and intended audience?
2. Is this text more a personal history or a social history?
3. Citing the passages in which the author describes his family life, personal feelings and reactions, analyse Dean Mahomed's representation of himself as an Indian, a Muslim and a man.

Readings

Fisher, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, pp. 31-134 or
Fisher, *The First Indian Author in English*, pp. 1-110

Supplementary Readings

The remainder of either of the above books by Fisher
Robinson, *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of India*, pp. 107-116
Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, pp. 44-81
Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*. pp. 45-59
Bayly, *Indian Society*, pp. 7-45

Unit III Literary Lives

The two autobiographies in this unit, unlike those in the previous unit, were written by men who made their living as authors. Like Dean Mahomed, however, both Nirad Chaudhuri (1896-1999) and R.K. Narayan (1906-2001) were deeply influenced by their encounter with British colonialism. And yet these two books could not be more different in narrative form and authorial voice. This may be a result of their respective literary landscapes. Chaudhuri wrote on the grand scale of civilisations and history, while Narayan fictionalised a small-town and its petty inhabitants.

Week 4-5 Chaudhuri, Nirad

Introduction

It is sometimes said that, in India, the ideas of social space and a private life were 'invented' during the 19th century and especially in Calcutta during the Bengal Renaissance. This was a time of debate regarding the role of the individual in the domestic, social and political spheres. Among literate, urban classes, the composition of the family and the physical dimensions of the household were changing. Calcutta, the then-capital of British India, was also a city where these same Indians had extensive contact with the English language, English literature and European ideas.

Nirad Chaudhuri's autobiography is only one of several that emerged from this intellectual and social context. It is, however, the most complex and controversial of these, if not of all Indian autobiographies. In its stubborn, contrary and mischievous examination of a life, this book is a compelling description of how of one culture can penetrate another culture. Published in 1951, at the mid-point of a life that spanned the twentieth century, this fiercely personal story also manages to be a provocative history of modern India.

Born in a small town, in what is now Bangladesh, Chaudhuri was educated in Calcutta, steeped himself in English literature and eventually emigrated to England in 1970, where he spent the rest of his life and became a 'Commander of the Order of the British Empire.' One of the challenges, and pleasures, for the reader is to identify the nuances of Chaudhuri's attitudes to India, Indians, England and the English. Although this long and rambling book is not an easy read, it repays effort.

Themes

colonialism; autobiography and history

Essay Questions

- 1 The author tells us a good deal about his childhood yet is selective about the events he describes. He also suggests that these earlier experiences shaped him as a man. In your opinion, which particular events were most significant in forming his character?
- 2 Chaudhuri situates his life within the broader context of Indian history. Describe how he interweaves personal and national history; and then explain the parallels that he perceives between the two.
- 3 The author dedicates his book to 'the memory of the British Empire,' which angered many Indians. It is well known that Chaudhuri liked to antagonise his fellow Indians, and in 1970 he moved to England, where he spent the rest of his life. On the other hand, he recognised the sophisticated culture of old Bengal, and he described his book as a 'backhanded criticism' of the British Empire. Evaluate the significance of the British Empire in this man's life.

Readings

Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*

Supplementary Readings

Kaviraj, 'The invention of private life'

Robinson, *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of India*, pp. 417-418

Metcalf, *A Concise History of modern India*, pp. 81-166

Shils, 'Citizen of the World'

Sabin, 'The beast in Nirad Chaudhuri's garden'

Week 6 **Narayan, R. K.**

Introduction

R. K. Narayan (1906-2001), like Nirad Chaudhuri, lived through every decade of the twentieth century. As with Chaudhuri, he was a writer who, though he loved his mother-tongue (Tamil in Narayan's case), wrote almost exclusively in English. Here the similarities end, for Narayan wrote of small-time lives in provincial towns, where he himself spent most of his life.

Narayan's life changed, when, after a brief stint as a teacher and while working as a journalist in Madras, one of his manuscripts was read by Graham Greene. 'Swami and Friends' was soon published in England, and Narayan became a best-seller. Greene also gave him the invaluable advice to shorten his name (from Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami to Narayan). His fiction (15 novels and 6 collections of short stories) revels in the full spectrum of human foibles, and eccentricities, including love, but always with grace and humor.

His autobiography is no exception. With self-deprecating wit, he tells us about his hometown, his indifferent school years and how he became a writer. Using a deceptively simple style, a good deal of dialogue and sharp characterisation, he presents a self-portrait with ironic distance. Beneath the jibes and journalistic reportage, however, we glimpse the anxieties of a young man, struggling to find his way. An early marriage, widowed six years later, a spot of journalism and haphazard participation in politics, but always the aspiration to become a writer. It is this combination of nonchalance and desperate desire that makes his autobiography as gripping as the melodramas he loved to read. Often compared to Faulkner (for his invention of a coherent micro-world) and to Dickens (for his quirky characters and their speech), he is a unique voice. Greene called him 'the novelist I admire most in the English language.'

Themes

colonialism; fiction and autobiography

Essay Questions

- 1 The author is one of India's finest novelists. In what specific ways does *My Days* differ from or resemble a novel? Is the author, for example, the hero of his own story?
- 2 Narayan tells the reader a great deal about his childhood and young adulthood. How did those early experiences lead to his career as a writer?
- 3 Discuss the role of colonialism in shaping Narayan's life and his writing of his life.
- 4 Formal education, reading for pleasure and oral storytelling all played a role in making the author. Discuss the significance of these three influences.

Reading

Narayan, *My Days*

Supplementary Reading

Robinson, *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of India*, pp. 417-418

Chaudhuri, 'A bottle of Ink'

Walsh, *R.K. Narayan*

Thieme, *R.K. Narayan*

Rao, *R.K. Narayan*

Trivedi, 'R.K. Narayan at 100'

Unit IV **Marginal Lives**

Although literacy is steadily increasing, most Indian lives are still shaped by an inability to read or write. Illiteracy is closely correlated with low social status and is widespread among the lowest castes, the 'Untouchables.' Gandhi called them 'Harijans' ('Children of God'), but today they are called 'Dalits' ('crushed', 'ground down'). These marginal people are the true 'unknown' Indians.

Fortunately, many of their orally narrated lives have now been recorded. Only a few, however, have been 'written down' or 'written up' and published. This unit contains two of these oral autobiographies of Dalits, one of a man and one of a woman.

Week 7-8 **Muli**

Introduction

Muli, the subject of Freeman's book, is not a likable person. He is poor and often hungry, but he is also a liar, a scamp and a pimp. Part of the fascination of this book is the intervention of the American anthropologist (Freeman), who searches for someone to tell their story and, having found Muli, must then sift fact from fiction. This serves to remind us that all autobiographies, whether written or spoken, whether of a banker or an agricultural worker, are stories. They purport to be accurate representations of a life, yet the process of storytelling requires invention since it is at one remove from the experiences narrated. Omission, elision, embroidery and exaggeration are not uncommon and may be useful narrative strategies for people who are regarded as the 'lowest of the low.'

Muli's story was produced from interviews conducted over a period of six months, which Freeman then translated into English, with the assistance of a local man. Freeman explains this process in detail and also provides an analysis of Muli's story that weighs up the influence of several factors in order to understand how predetermined his life was. Evaluating the interplay of free will and destiny, Freeman reaches the conclusion that the conditions of Muli's life doomed him to failure. In telling his story, however, Muli transcends the fixed limits of his place in local society.

Themes

social status and life-history; agency in oral autobiography; oral vs written autobiography

Essay Questions

- 1 To what extent is Muli the author of his own story?
- 2 A classic 'unreliable narrator,' Muli nonetheless wants his interlocutor to understand his life. Does he succeed in this goal?
- 3 Freeman concludes that Muli's life 'was bound to fail.' Do you agree?

Reading

Freeman, *Untouchable*

Supplementary Reading

Robinson, *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of India*, pp. 364-366

Ganguly, 'Dalit life histories'

Deliege, *The Untouchables of India*, pp. 4-26, 89-145

Béteille, 'Caste in contemporary India'

Week 9-10 **Viramma**

Introduction

Viramma belongs to the Paraiyar ('pariah') caste, the lowest of the low in the local hierarchy, who live in virtual bondage to the upper castes in her village. She and her husband have no land and almost no money. Nine of her 12 children die before her. Her hardship is leavened by the pleasure she takes in the oral and performance culture all around her. We also learn about the many forces that determine her life, including gods and goddesses, interactions between castes, modernisation and political initiatives to reduce poverty and caste inequality.

Viramma tells her own stories, or episodes, which the anthropologists who befriended her stitch together into a single narrative, which is then translated from French to English. The joins may sometimes show but not often and the result is a raw and vivid portrayal of a life lived by millions of Indians today.

Themes

social status and life-history; agency in oral autobiography; oral vs written autobiography

Essay Questions

1 Viramma told her story to two French anthropologists, one of whom also spoke her mother tongue of Tamil. They transcribed those interviews and edited them into a book, which they translated into French. You have read the English translation of that translation. To what extent has Viramma's story, as published in print, been influenced by its oral telling and by the process of its production?

2 Viramma is a Paraiyar (fem.Paratchi), an Untouchable or Dalit, the lowest level of the caste system. Throughout the book she interacts with other castes, especially the 'Grand Reddiar', who is the highest caste. Describe how this book helps you to understand the caste system in India.

3 Although Viramma and her family are dominated by others, both her husband and her son Amban rebel against domination. Outsiders and government schemes also represent scope for change. How does Viramma understand and cope with her situation? And what hope for emancipation from caste oppression is found in her story?

Reading

Viramma: Life of an Untouchable

Supplementary Readings

osine and Rosine, 'Beyond silence'

Moon, *Growing Up Untouchable*

Narayan, *Mondays on the Dark Side of the Moon*

Anand, *Untouchable*

Unit V Political Lives

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru used autobiographical writing to think through the great political and ethical dilemmas that faced them as leaders of Indian Independence. Both began their stories while in jail for their activities in support of Independence. Their detailed accounts of meetings, negotiations and policies are enlivened by the dramatic struggle to reconcile pragmatic politics with principled philosophy. Ideally, these two texts should be read in tandem since the two visionaries of India's future held different views on this fundamental question. Each man had his view tested, each man suffered self-doubts and each came close to abandoning his path. In the end, we cannot say which triumphed. Only that India gained its freedom.

Week 11-12 Gandhi

Introduction

Gandhi's is perhaps the most private and introspective of the best-known Indian autobiographies. At the same time, it is also the most influential. Gandhi's explanation of his practice of *satyagraha* ('truth force') influenced freedom movements across the globe, including those led by Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. We also must keep in mind that it was originally written as weekly instalments for a Gujarati-language journal and that it ends in 1920, when Gandhi's greatest achievements still lay ahead of him.

'Experiments with Truth', however, is not a standard narrative of one's life. Rather than a chronology of events, it is an intense self-examination, and at times self-condemnation, of the author's adherence to his philosophy of 'truth force.' These moral lessons do not always add up to a 'good read,' and their puritanism about dress, food and sex will put off some readers today. Although its 'confessional' tone often prompts comparison with Rousseau and other western autobiographies, and although Gandhi was indeed influenced by Christianity, this book burns with a singular flame. The author's fierce honesty, as a man, a husband and a political leader, is remarkable. Perhaps a narrative failure, this book nevertheless succeeds in revealing how the passion of a single man led to the political independence of an entire nation.

Themes

Indian Independence; politics v philosophy; confession as autobiography

Essay Questions

- 1 Identify and discuss what you consider to be the three most important influences on Gandhi's life.
- 2 What does Gandhi mean by 'experiments with truth'?
- 3 Describe how childhood helped to shape the author's life.
- 4 Politics might appear to be an odd field in which to seek spiritual truth. How does Gandhi reconcile this apparent incompatibility?

Readings

Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth*

Supplementary Readings

Arnold, 'The self and the cell'

Robinson, *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of India*, pp. 116-147

Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, pp. 167-202

Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, pp. 109-119, 128-134

Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*

Week 13-14 **Nehru, Jawaharlal**

Introduction

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote his autobiography while serving a jail sentence in 1934-1935. It was not his first time he had been imprisoned for campaigning for Indian independence. It was his fourth. In fact, between 1920 and 1947, when India gained Independence, Nehru spent a full ten years in prison.

Though it begins with family origins, Nehru's autobiography is a long and detailed record of India during the 1920s and 1930s. As such, it is an incomparable source for understanding the political and social developments that led to the independence of India. But it also contains a good deal of introspection by the author, who tries to fashion a sort of philosophy out of the events he witnessed and participated in.

Nehru, after Gandhi, is probably the best-known Indian from the colonial and early Independence period. Educated at Harrow School in England and then at Cambridge University, he became India's first Prime Minister and influenced world politics, especially the so-called 'non-aligned bloc' (not aligned to neither East or West) during the Cold War. He led a privileged life yet sacrificed it all by throwing himself full-throttle into the campaign for Indian independence. Although he succeeded in his goals, his successors (the 'Nehru dynasty') have been marred by tragedy. After he died in 1964, his daughter and her son both served as Prime Minister, and both were assassinated.

Themes

anti-imperialism and Independence; political goals vs ethical means; autobiography and history

Essay Questions

1. Nehru planned 'to trace my own mental development' and not to write 'a survey of recent Indian history.' Did he succeed?
- 2 Discuss the significance of Gandhi in Nehru's story.
- 3 How did the Independence Movement shape Nehru's life?
- 4 Discuss the role of either Kamala (his wife) or Motilal (his father) in the autobiography.

Reading

Nehru, *An Autobiography*

Supplementary Readings

Arnold, 'The self and the cell'

Brown, *Nehru*

Tharoor, *Nehru*

Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, pp. 203-251

Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, pp. 167-181

Women's Lives : The Life of a Bandit Queen

On February 14, 1981, 18-year-old Phoolan had only one thing on her mind: revenge. Waiting outside a remote village on the Yamuna River in northern India, a band of about 20 bandits waited for her instructions. The bandits were from different gangs, but their common goal was to hunt down the man who had murdered Phoolan's lover, while she slept beside him.

Married at ten, to a man twenty years older, Phoolan experienced a life of brutality. She was raped several times, including by the police, and put in jail. Eventually she became the leader of her own gang of low-caste men who attacked upper-caste villages and held captives for ransom. When her gang murdered 22 men, she became the target of a manhunt by the Indian government for two years. She surrendered on her own terms and agreed to go to prison. Emerging 11 years later, she was twice elected to the Indian Parliament and then shot dead in 2001.

Her story, as printed, is based on 2,000 pages of oral interviews in Hindi that were transcribed in Hindi and then translated into English. Finally, two western writers wrote the published book. On the printed page, it is almost as sensational as the accounts of her life in newspapers, biographies and films, and some have doubted its authenticity.

Phoolan was illiterate and she only 'approved each page [of the book as it was read out to her] with her signature' (p. 468). No further information is given about the process of transforming her oral interviews in Hindi into a printed book in English. We do not know who carried out the interviews, who transcribed them or who translated them. Nor do we know if Phoolan had any role in the selection of events included in the book. One of the writers is a French TV presenter, while the other is a British writer on rock music, both of whom have written best-selling books, including biographies, about people in the Third World.

This book thus raises issues of agency and voice, so fundamental to the production of an autobiography. Indeed, one could say that the western writers 'ghost' wrote Phoolan's story. Still, there is no doubt that her life became (and to an extent still is) a powerful symbol of female resistance, and not only in India.

Themes

fiction and autobiography; oral autobiography;

Essay Questions

- 1 What is Phoolan's goal in writing/speaking her story?
- 2 Some critics claim that parts of her story are fabricated. Explain why you think this is or is not important.
- 3 Using this text as an example, discuss the problems and/or advantages of writing a spoken autobiography

Reading

Phoolan Devi, *I, Phoolan Devi*

Supplementary Reading

Weaver, 'India's Bandit Queen'

Sen, *India's Bandit Queen*

Pinch, review of film

Fernandes, 'Reading "India's Bandit Queen"'

Submission of Final Research Papers

Preparation and submission of final research papers

FORMAT FOR RESEARCH PAPERS

Guidelines

1. The research paper must be at least 5000 words.
2. It must be typed, double-spaced, with a 12-point font and the pages must be numbered.
3. It should contain a full bibliography, with a minimum of five entries, excluding required texts for this course. However, required texts should be included in the bibliography if you refer to them (as is expected).
4. The paper must have either footnotes or endnotes, using Harvard, MLA or Chicago styles. It is acceptable to cite a source in a note in the following way, if that same source is fully cited in the bibliography:
author's surname, short title of book or article, page number(s).
e.g., Wilson, *Fiction in India*, p. 34.

Reading List

Most of the books listed below are available in paperback at reasonable prices.

- Arnold, David and Stuart Blackburn (eds.). *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History* (Permanent Black, 2004)
- Banarasidas. *Ardhakathanak (A Half Story)*. trans. R. Chowdhury (Penguin, Delhi, 2009)
- Chaudhuri, Nirad C. *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951, numerous editions)
- Fisher, Michael H. *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) in India, Ireland and England*. (OUP, Delhi, 1996) OR *The Travels of Dean Mahomet: An Eighteenth-Century Journey Through India*. ed. Michael Fischer (California, 1997)
- Freeman, J.M. *Untouchable: An Indian Life History* (Stanford, 1979)
- Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. trans. M. Desai (Penguin Classics, several editions)
- Narayan, R.K. *My Days* (Chatto and Windus, 1975)
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *An Autobiography: with musings on recent events in India* (Bodley Head, 1936)
- Phoolan Devi, with Marie-Thérèse Cuny and Paul Rambali. *I, Phoolan Devi: The Autobiography of India's Bandit Queen* (Little, Brown and Company, 1995)
- Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography. A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minnesota, 2004).
- Viramma, Josiane Racine and Jean-Luc Racine. *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* (Verso, 1997)

Note: In addition to the required and recommended readings for each week, students would do well to read a general history, especially a cultural history, of modern India. The following books are recommended for gaining this background:

French, Patrick. *India: A Portrait* (Knopf, 2011).

Fuller, Chris. *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society* (Princeton, 1992, 2004).

Khilnani, Sunil. *The Idea of India* (Hamish Hamilton, several editions available).

Naipaul, V.S. *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (Penguin, several editions available)

Anand, Mulk Raj. *Untouchable* (Penguin, 1935, many editions).

Anderson, Linda. *Autobiography* (Routledge, 2011, 2nd ed.). Arnold, David. 'The self and the cell,' In Arnold and Blackburn (eds.), *Telling Lives in India* (Permanent Black, 2006), pp. 29-53.

Bayly, C. A. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1988).

Béteille, André. 'Caste in contemporary India.' In Chris Fuller (ed.), *Caste Today* (OUP, 1996), pp. 150-179.

Brown, Judith. *Nehru* (Longman, 1999).

Chaudhuri, Amit. 'A Bottle of Ink, a Pen and a Blotter,' *London Review of Books* (Vol. 23 No. 15, 9 August 2001), pp.21-22.

Das Gupta, Arun. 'Situating the individual in Medieval India: an Excursion into History Beyond the Mainstream', *The Calcutta History Journal*, XVI, 2 (July–December 1994). pp. 1–27.

Deliege, Robert. *The Untouchables of India*. trans. Nora Scott (Berg, 1999).

Erikson, Erik. *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (Norton, 1993).

Fernandes, Leela. 'Reading "India's Bandit Queen": A trans/national feminist perspective on the discrepancies of representation.' *Signs*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Autumn, 1999), pp.123-152.

Ganguly, Debjani. 'Dalit life histories.' In Vasudha Dalmia and Rashmi Sadana (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. tbc

Hansen, Kathryn. *Stages of Life: Indian Theatre Autobiographies* (Permanent Black, 2011).

Kaviraj, Sudipta. 'The invention of private life.' In Arnold and Blackburn (eds.), *Telling Lives in India* (Permanent Black, 2004), pp. 83-115.

Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengali Renaissance* (California, 1969). Lokuge, Chandani. *India*

Calling: the Memories of Cornelia Sorabji, India's First Woman Barrister (OUP, Delhi, 2001). Metcalf, Barbara and Thomas Metcalf. *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge, 2nd ed. 2006). Mines, Mattison. *Public Faces, Private Voices: Community and Individuality in South India* (California, 1994). Narayan, Kirin. *Mondays on the Dark Side of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales* (OUP, 1997). Moon, Vasant. *Growing Up Untouchable in India. A Dalit Autobiography*. trans. Gail Olmvedt (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

Pinch, William. Review of film: *The Bandit Queen* by Sundeep S. Bedi, Shekhar Kapur & Mala Sen. *American Historical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 4 (Oct. 1996), pp. 1149-1150.

Rao, Ranga. *R.K. Narayan* (Sahitya Akademi, 2005).

Robinson, Francis (ed.). *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka* (Cambridge, 1989).

Sabin, Mary. 'The beast in Nirad Chaudhuri's garden.' *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. XLIV, No. 1 (1993), pp. 26-48.

Sen, Mala. *India's Bandit Queen: The True Story of Phoolan Devi* (Harper Collins, 1993).

Shils, Edward. 1988. 'Citizen of the world. Nirad C. Chaudhuri.' *The American Scholar* (Autumn) 549-73.

Snell, Rupert. 'Confessions of a 17th-century Jain merchant: The Ardhakathanak of Banarasidas.' *South Asian Research* 25:1 (May 2005), pp. 79-104.

Tharoor, Shashi. *Nehru: The Invention of India* (Arcade, 2003).

Thieme, John. *R.K. Narayan* (Manchester, 2007).

Trivedi, Harish. 'R.K. Narayan at 100.' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Vol. 42, No. 2 (June 2007), pp.1-6.

Viramma, Josiane Racine and Jean-Luc Racine. *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* (Verso, 1997).

Walsh, William. *R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation* (Chicago, 1982).

Weaver, Mary Anne. 'India's Bandit Queen.' *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 278, No. 5 (Nov. 1996), pp. 89-104.

Syllabus

Contents

Overview

Early Autobiography

Parasidas

Mahomet

Literary Lives

Chaudhuri

Narayan

Marginal Lives

Muli

Viramma

Political Lives

Gandhi

Nehru

Women's Lives

Phoolan

Research paper

Readings

Recommended Reading

Course Content:

Literary works that have been designated as being produced within the category of the course topic.
Discussion of the historical, social, cultural and biographical contexts in which those works were produced.
Literary movements in various periods.
Discussion of the theoretical issues and questions related to historical, social, cultural, and biographical approaches to the study of the course topic.
Figurative, archetypes, and stylistic considerations.
Criticism and reflection upon political and economic systems as reflected in literature.
Discussion of the relevance of course readings to the understanding of contemporary global issues.
Critical analysis and interpretation.
Conducting scholarly research on and off-line.

Course Outline:

For the detailed course outline, please see the calendar.

Course Readings:

For a list of course readings, please see the Readings page on the course website

Course Preparedness:

This course is a graduate-level literature course. It assumes the mastery of prerequisite college-level skills in spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphing, and essay writing. It also assumes the ability to read and analyze literary texts. This course provides instruction in world literature and does not address remedial writing issues at the sentence, paragraph, or essay level.

This course focuses on literary texts and analysis and requires college-level writing skills that exceed those required at the secondary level.

However, in some cases, students who have not yet completed a bachelor's degree may be allowed to take the course.

Course Workload:

For a sixteen-week course, students can expect to devote a minimum of 6 hours of independent study per week in order to complete the coursework. If students are taking the course in an accelerated 8-week mode, they can expect to devote a minimum of 12 hours per week of study.

Assessment Strategy

Learners will demonstrate their knowledge of the subject and their ability to engage in critical thinking and problem solving activities.

Journal Entries/Discussion Questions. Designed to help students identify authors, their works, literary terms, and concepts. Students will also analyze texts, connect the authors, texts, and critical concepts. Finally, students look at texts from multiple perspectives in order to evaluate their own thought processes.

Synchronous Online Activities. Designed to help learners apply the concepts in the course to texts, and to share their insights.

Essay / Research Paper. Designed to help students write scholarly papers and engage in literary analysis. Students will develop a clear thesis which they support with literary citations, a close reading of the text, application of critical theories and perspectives. Students will focus on developing multiple interpretations of a single text, or will look at multiple texts within a movement, genre, or author's oeuvre.