



V-SAK 33/26: Opprettelse av SOSANT2145 – Regional Ethnography: South Asia

Saken legges frem for Programrådet:

- ☒ Til behandling
- ☐ Til orientering
- ☐ Til diskusjon
- ☐ Til uttalelse

Forslagsstiller: Emneansvarlig Kenneth Bo Nielsen

Vedtaksforslag: Programrådet vedtar opprettelsen av SOSANT2145 og forslaget til emnebeskrivelse.

Bakgrunn

I revisjonen av bachelorprogrammet ble det vedtatt at de fleste valgfrie emner i programmet skal telle 5 studiepoeng på 2000-nivå. Hvert semester skal det tilbys ett emne i regional etnografi i denne kategorien.

Grunnet liten tid før registrering av vårens emner i EpN (frist 16. oktober), sendes forslaget på sirkulasjon til programrådet.



Forslag til emnebeskrivelse

SOSANT2145 – Regional Ethnography: South Asia

Credits

5

Level

Bachelor

Teaching

Vår eller høst

Exam

Vår eller høst

Teaching language

English

Course content

What can anthropology reveal about a region where diverse religions, histories, and political traditions come together in complex and often contested ways? In South Asia, these intersections shape questions of identity, power, authority, and social life in important ways, revealing how familiar anthropological questions can be lived and negotiated in strikingly different ways. This course invites you to explore South Asia ethnographically, engaging with the everyday lives, practices, struggles, and political worlds that define the region.

The course introduces key ethnographic themes that have shaped anthropological scholarship within and beyond South Asia, including colonialism, lived religion, and how social and political life is organised and contested. It also examines how these themes have been approached in different ethnographic settings and through different historical trajectories. The focus is primarily on



contemporary India and Pakistan, with comparative perspectives from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge

- You will acquire basic knowledge of South Asia as an ethnographic region.
- You will gain an ethnographic perspective on how religion and broader historical and social processes shape everyday life in South Asia.
- You will acquire specialised knowledge of select themes in the anthropology of South Asia.

Skills

- You will be able to critically compare cultural and political processes within and across regions.
- You will be able to connect ethnographic examples to broader anthropological questions about South Asia.

General competence

- You will have the ability to critically engage with contemporary social anthropological insights.
- You will develop an ability to situate everyday experiences within broader social contexts.
- You will have a stronger understanding of and respect for social and cultural variation.

Admission to the course

Studenter må hvert semester [søke og få plass på undervisningen og melde seg til eksamen](#) i Studentweb.

Dersom du ikke allerede har studieplass ved UiO, kan du søke opptak til våre [studieprogrammer](#), eller søke om å bli [enkeltemnestudent](#).



Teaching

Lectures

Examination

Four-hour school exam.

Examination support material

Usage of a dictionary during the examination is allowed, subject to prior inspection by SV-info. [See guidelines for further details.](#)

Language of examination

You may write your examination paper in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish or English.

Grading scale

Grades are awarded on a scale from A to F, where A is the best grade and F is a fail. Read more about [the grading system](#).

Also see [Grading guidelines in social anthropology](#).

Language of examination

The examination text is given in English and Norwegian. You may submit your response in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish or English.

Grading scale

Grades are awarded on a scale from A to F, where A is the best grade and F is a fail. Read more about [the grading system](#).



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Also see [Grading guidelines in social anthropology](#).



Regional ethnography: South Asia: Course outline with readings

1. The Making of South Asia and its place in current anthropology

How did modern South Asia emerge as an ethnographic region, and how does it shape current anthropological debates? These questions are at the heart of the first lecture that introduces South Asia as an ethnographic and historically constituted region, providing students with the geographical, historical and social context necessary for engaging with the ethnographic material that the course introduces. Rather than treating South Asia as a self-evident or culturally homogeneous region, we consider how its boundaries, histories, social formations and diverse ways of life have been shaped through processes of colonialism, partition, state formation, migration and mobility. This introductory grounding will provide students with an understanding of South Asia as a diverse ethnographic context through which current anthropological questions can be explored. We illustrate the contemporary significance of the region via two examples that showcase South Asian contributions to the frontiers of contemporary anthropological debates on (de)coloniality, rightwing authoritarianism, and infrastructures.

Readings (69 pages):

Ian Talbot (2006): Partition, Memory and Trauma: Voices of Punjabi Refugee Migrants in Lahore and Amritsar. *Sikh Formations* 2 (1): 3–16. (13 pages)

Carol Upadhyia (2011): Colonial Anthropology, Law, and Adivasi Struggles: The Case of Jharkhand. In: *Doing Sociology in India*, 266-289. Oxford University Press. (23 pages)

Alpa Shah (2024): When Decolonization is Highjacked. *American Anthropologist* 126 (4): 553-566. (13 pages).

Fatima Tassadiq (2024): Colonial Laws, Postcolonial Infrastructures: Land Acquisition, Urban Informality and Politics of Infrastructural Development in Pakistan. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 42 (3): 401-421. (20 pages).



2. Islam and Hinduism: Lived Religion and Everyday Life

How do religious ideas, practices and sensibilities shape everyday life and social relations? This lecture offers a grassroots perspective on social life in India and Pakistan, grounding broader anthropological questions in the lived experiences, practices and social worlds of ordinary people. It engages with debates around piety and secularity, examining how Islamic and Hindu ideas, practices and sensibilities shape everyday life while leaving other aspects relatively untouched. We also examine how people navigate the intersections of religion, culture and everyday life, including tensions between religious ideals and everyday practices, changing religious sensibilities and the exercise of everyday agency.

Readings (86 pages):

Muhammad Bilal (2024): Finding religion in everyday life: How lifeworlds work in Pakistan. In *Beyond the law: Living blasphemy in Pakistan: Ethnography of mundane violence, faith, and lifeworlds*, 31-68). Palgrave Macmillan. (37 pages).

David N. Gellner (2026): Living with Polytypy and Hierarchy: The Anthropology of Hinduism. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Anthropology of Religion*, 273-290. Oxford University Press. (17 pages).

Tulsi Srinivas (2018): Introduction: Wonder, creativity, and ethical life in Bangalore. In *The Cow in the Elevator*, 1-33. Duke University Press (32 pages).

Supplementary readings:

Ina Zharkevich (2016): When Gods return to their homeland in the Himalayas: Maoism, religion, and change in the model village of Thabang, mid-western Nepal. In *Religion, Secularism, and Ethnicity in Contemporary Nepal*, edited by Gellner, Hausner, and Letizia, 77-114. Oxford University Press.



3. Political performativity and authority

How is political authority constituted in different South Asian contexts? And how is power established and exercised within and beyond formal political domains? In this lecture, we revisit classic debates on the constitution of the political and the workings of power in South Asia, with a particular emphasis on the intertwining of the political and the religious. We also pay attention to recent anthropological scholarship that has demonstrated the importance of performativity, affect, materiality and deification to the production of authority and political leadership.

Readings (100 pages):

Sharika Thiranagama (2022): The Names of the Leader: The Political Deification of Prabhakaran. *Religion* 52 (4): 513-531. (18 pages)

Simona Vittorini (2022): Modi a la Mode: Narendra Modi's Fashion and the Performance of Populist Leadership. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 60 (3): 276-297. (23 pages)

Julian Kuttig (2020): Posters, Politics and Power: Mediated Materialisation of Public Authority in Bangladesh Party Politics. *South Asia* 43 (4): 632-657. (25 sider).

Adeem Suhail (2026): The Brokerage of Order in Karachi. *Modern Asian Studies* (online first). 19 pages.

Muhammad Bilal (2018): Rethinking the authority of Muslim religious scholars and mosques in shaping religious discourse in Pakistan: An ethnographic account. *Anthropological Notebooks* 24 (2): 7-22.

Supplementary readings:

Lucia Michelutti (2017): The Cult of the Boss. *Seminar* 693. (10 pages)

Moumuta Sen and Kenneth Bo Nielsen (2022): Gods in the Public Sphere: Political Deification in South Asia. *Religion* 52 (4): 497-512. (15 pages)



4. Social organisation, law, and popular mobilisation

Caste, kinship and community are central to the organisation of social life across South Asia. They also inform identities and categories that are increasingly becoming central to both legal and popular mobilisation, as various collectivities organise to stake claims on the state for recognition or the redistribution of resources. In this lecture, we look at the interface of social organisation, law and state practices, and popular mobilisation. We focus on legal mobilisation around land, forests, and everyday violence, and how they intersect with caste, tribe and gender hierarchies,

Readings (108 pages):

Kenneth Bo Nielsen (2015): Law and Larai: The (De)Judicialisation of Subaltern Resistance in West Bengal. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 45 (4): 618-639. (21 pages)

Anand Vaidya (2025): The Law as Rumour. In *Future of the Forest: Struggles over Land and Law in India*, 86-107. Cornell University Press. (21 pages)

Sandya Fuchs (2024): Truth Clashes: Caste Atrocities, False Cases, and the Limits of Hate Crime in North India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 30 (3): 669-686. (17 pages).

Faris A. Khan (2019): Institutionalizing an Ambiguous Category: 'Khwaja Sira' Activism, the State, and Sex/Gender Regulation in Pakistan. *Anthropological Quarterly* 92 (4): 1135–1172. (37 pages).

Farrukhi, G. A. (2024): 'So that we may be counted': Caste, religion, and untimely numbers in Pakistan's national census. *American Ethnologist* 51 (3): 363–375. (12 pages)

Supplementary readings:

Kenneth Bo Nielsen, M. Sudhir Selvaraj and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (2023): Hindu Nationalist Statecraft, Dog-Whistle Legislation and the Vigilante State in India. *Swedish Journal of Anthropology* 6 (2): 19-37. (18 pages)



Julia Eckert (2006): From Subjects to Citizens: Legalism from Below and the Homogenisation of the Legal Sphere. *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 38 (53/54): 45-75.

5. South Asian Waters and their Inequalities

For this lecture, we will explore how issues of pollution, toxicity, and infrastructural development affect the waters of South Asia and the communities that live between land and sea. We will consider how climate change, water pollution, and urban redevelopment are reinforcing the vulnerabilities of marginalized residents living and working near water landscapes. We will consider how the transformations of the sea, of wetlands, and of the coastal environments of South Asia relate to the exclusion of and the violence performed upon groups living on the political and geographical edges of water and land. Colonial, post-colonial, and neo-colonial boundaries re-emerge in relation to recent transformation and pollution of South Asian seas, coasts, and wetlands.

Readings (50 pages):

Nikhil Anand and Lalitha Camath (2024): Eviscerating the sea. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 44 (1): 118-134. (16 pages)

Chiara Arnavas (2026): The Making of 'Ecological Criminals': Green Urbanism, Religion, and Environmental Inequalities in India. *Antipode* 58 (4). (13 pages)

Camelia Dewan and Elizabeth A. Sibilia (2024): Global Containments and Local Leakages: Structural Violence and the Toxic Flows of Shipbreaking. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 42 (1): 80-101. (21 pages)