

Ambedkar University Delhi

Course Outline

Winter Semester (January to May 2018)

Time Slot: Monday 9-11 am, Thursday 11-1 pm

School:	School of Liberal Studies
Programme with title:	MA (History)
Semester to which offered:	Open to both
Course Title:	Oral Epics in India: Exploring History and Identity
Credits:	4 Credits
Course Code (new):	SLS2H108
Course Code (old):	MHE11

Type of Course:

Compulsory	No
Elective	yes

For SUS only (Mark an X for as many as appropriate):

1. Foundation (Compulsory)
2. Foundation (Elective)
3. Discipline (Compulsory)
4. Discipline (Elective) X
5. Elective X
- 6.

Course Coordinator and Team: Tanuja Kothiyal

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Pre-requisites: None

Aim

Brief description of modules/ Main modules:

Oral Epics in India: Exploring History and Identity

The purpose of this course is to explore some oral folk narrative traditions as texts and performances and examine the processes through which multilayered social identities emerge. The traditions that may be explored in this course include *Pabuji*, *Devnarayan*, *Dhola*, *Umar Marvi jo kisso* and *Khandoba*, among others, in the genres in which they are performed like *swang*, *kissa*, *kathaa vachan*, *phad vachan*, *jhurava* etc .

The course begins with a larger discussion on the context in which oral and folk epic traditions became a part of the quest for knowledge about India. The collection and interpretation of oral narratives by colonial Indologists like William Crooke, Grierson, Tessitori, played an important role in generating certain essentialist notions about community identities in colonial India. These ideas have been challenged by twentieth century folklorists, anthropologists, historians and litterateurs. Exploring this methodological journey of the oral epic would help us engage with the development of oral narrative traditions in various parts of India, and bring into discussion the use of such narrative traditions as sources for history writing. The course would consider the multilayered nature of orality (as fluid, mobile, open and contextual) as well as questions of legitimacy and authenticity, particularly with regards to historians' concerns with oral epic traditions.

The course will explore variants of Indian Folk Traditions viz; the martial, sacrificial and romantic, as well as the dominant ideologies around which they are spun like heroism, sacrifice, death, deification, divinity and fate. It would also explore the oral epic traditions as interfaces between the inner and outer as illustrated in the notions of *Akam* and *Puram*. An attempt would also be made to unravel the interfaces between the folk narratives and certain pan-Indian traditions particularly the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

The course will trace the context of oral narrative development both as a textual and performative traditions. The analysis of these traditions would take into account the ecological and social context in which these traditions evolve, and the reverberating notions of caste, community and gender that emerge as these traditions get reinterpreted through contemporary performances. The unravelling of the narratives is intended to draw the students towards exploring the ever shifting boundaries between oral narratives and history.

The course will finally explore the dynamic relationship between the performer and the audience, both as situated in the patron-client mode and one that locates the performer as the author as well as the custodian of the idea of “self” of the audience groups. The constant movement of narrator groups like Bhopas, Bairagis, Nayaks, Kamads, Sevags, Pancholis, Doms, Manganiyars, Bhats, Charans, from the position of empowered preservers of traditions to marginalized low caste wanderers also leads to conflicting notions of authorship and ownership in these traditions. The course would delve into these conflicts as well as explore the ways in which the conversion of traditions into “conserved art forms” has also lead to altered form and content aimed at an entirely different audience.

The course will employ a textual as well as audio-visual sources, as well as secondary literature in order to illustrate and interpret Oral Epic Traditions.

Course Structure

1. Indian Oral Epics: Introduction (3 weeks)

A.

- Discovering India’s Spoken: William Crooke and the folklore of India
- “Studying Oral Epics”: Some methodological concerns
- Orality and History
- Orality and Memory

B.

- Types of Oral Epic Traditions in India
- Patterns of Development in Indian Oral Epic Traditions: Martial, Sacrificial and Romantic
- Oral Epic Traditions and Pan-Indian Narratives

C.

- Dominant Ideologies in Oral Epic Traditions
 - Heroism
 - Fate
 - Sacrifice
 - Divinity
 - Death and Deification

Ist Assignment Take Home Essay 20% (Due 17th February 2017)

2. Some Oral Epics and their Narrative structures (3 weeks)

- Dhola
- Annanmar
- Heer Ranjha
- Khandoba

(This section would entail engagement with both the textual as well as audio-visual forms)

3. Contextualising Oral Epic Traditions (1 week)

- Locating Oral Epics in Time and Space
- Oral Epics as Historical Traditions
- Understanding Ritual Context of Oral Epic Traditions

4. Oral Epics and Social Identity (2 Weeks)

- Representations of identities
- Authorships and Representations
- Oral Epics as Counter-narratives

5. Gendered Spaces in Oral Epics (2 Weeks)

- Representations of Women in Epics: Martial, Sacrificial and Romantic
- Women's Voices as Counter Systems
- Deification of Women in Oral Epics
- Nymphs, Goddesses, Virgins/ Mothers, Wives, Satis

Ind Assignment Project (30 +10%) Due March 28th 2017

6. Oral Epics as Performances (2 weeks)

- Situating Performers/Priests
- Performance as Narration
- Performance as Dialogue
- Performance as Discourse
- Performance as Ritual
- Performance as Art
- Performance as a Counter-System

(This section would require the class to engage with audio-visual source materials)

End Semester Exam 40%

Readings (Essential and Suggestive: Readings for each module would be marked at the beginning of each module)

Autsen, Ralph, *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature and Performance*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1999.

Bakhtin, Mikhael, *Rabelias and his World*, tr Helene Islowsky, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984.

Beck, Brenda, *The Three Twins: The telling of a South Indian Folk Epic*, Indiana University Press, 1982.

Blackburn, S.H. and A.K. Ramanujan (eds), *Another Harmony: New Essays on Folklore in India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986.

Blackburn, S.H., P.J. Claus, J.B. Flueckiger and S.S.Wadley (eds), *Oral Epics in India*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986.

Finnegan, R., *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977.

Gold, Ann, *A Carnival of Parting: The Tales of Raja Bhrathari and Gopichand*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992.

Halbawachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, (Ed. and Tr.) Lewis Coser, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.

Harlan, L, *The Goddesses' Henchmen: Gender in Indian Hero Worship*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

Heesterman, J C, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985.

Henige, D, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: quest for a chimera*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974.

Hiltebeitel, A, *Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits: Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001,

Hutton, Patrick, *History as the Art of Memory*, University of New England Press, London.

Kamphorst, Janet, *In Praise of Death, History and Poetry in Medieval Marwar (South Asia)*, Leiden University press, Leiden, 2008.

Kothari, K., "Musicians for the People: The Manganiyars of Western Rajasthan". In K. Schomer (etal.) (eds), *The Idea of Rajasthan, Explorations in Regional Identity*. Vol 2. Manohar, New Delhi, 1994, 205-237.

Ladurie, Emmanuel Le Roy, *Carnival in Romans*, tr Mary Feeney, George Braziller, NY, 1979.

Malik, Aditya, *Nectar Gaze and Poison Breath: An Analysis and Translation of Rajasthani Oral Narrative of Dev Narayan*, OUP, New York 2005.

Mayaram, Shail, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the shaping of a Muslim Identity*, OUP, Delhi, 1997.

Norra, Piere, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire', *Representations*, No 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter Memory (Spring 1989, 7-24)

Ong, Walter, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Routledge, 2002.

Ramanujan, A K, "Three-hundred Ramayanas: Five examples and three thoughts on translation". In P.Richman (ed), *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997. 22-46.

Ricouer, Paul, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, tr Kathleen Blaney and David Pellaver, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004.

Rubin, D.C. *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995.

Smith, J. D., "Old Indian: the two Sanskrit Epics". In A.T. Hatto (ed.), *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry*. Vol. 1: The traditions, The Modern Humanities Research Association, London, 1980, 48-78.

Smith, J D, "The Singer or the Song?: A reassessment of Lord's "oral theory"". *Man* (n.s.) 12, 1977, 141-53.

Smith, J.D., "Rajasthani. How to sing a tale. Epic performance in the Pabuji tradition". In J.B.Hainsworth and A.T. Hatto. *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry Volume Two: Characteristics and Techniques*, Modern Humanities Research Association, London, 29-41, 1989.

Smith, J D, "Worlds apart: Orality, Literacy, and the Rajasthani Folk-Mahabharata". In *Oral Traditions*, 5/1, 1990, 3-19.

Smith, J.D., *The Epic of Pabuji. A Study, Transcription and Translation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

Thapar, R., "The Historian and the Epic" *Cultural Pasts*, OUP, New Delhi, 2000, 613-630.

Vansina, J, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, tr. H M Wright, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 1965, 2006.

Vansina, J, *Oral Tradition as History*, James Currey Ltd, Oxford, 1985, 1997.

Wadley, Susan, *Raja Nal and the Goddess: The North Indian Epic of Dhola in Performance*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2004

Tentative Assessment schedule with details of weightage:

S.No	Assessment	Date/period in which Assessment will take place	Weightage
1	Ist Assessment: Take Home Assignment	Mid February 2018	20%
2	Project and Presentation	End March 2018	30% +10%
3	End Semester Exam	As per SLS Schedule	30%
4	Class Participation Grade	Weekly Thought Piece	10%