The aim of this course is to provide an introduction to modern South Asian society through a reading, mainly, of novels, or otherwise of a text (by Katherine Boo) with a strong narrative. The novels are works written in English (India and Pakistan are homes to some of the finest of all contemporary novelists writing in English – authors of the caliber of Arundhati Roy and Mohsin Hamid). One of the novels I will discuss (Raag Darbari, by Shrilal Shukla) has been translated from Hindi.

Why study the societies of India and Pakistan – or of anywhere else in the world – through reading novels? The American novelist, the late E. L. Doctorow once wrote “The historian will tell you what happened. The novelist will tell you what it felt like”. Much the same might be said of the work of sociologists and anthropologists by comparison with that of novelists. Sociologists and anthropologists – like historians, actually - are concerned not only with what happens in society, but also with explaining it. Some novelists, too, aim not only to ‘tell you what it felt like’, though this is very important – because I don’t think that any work of social science can give you the ‘feel’ of South Asian society as well as can the novels - but also to analyse and explain, even through fiction. Thus Upamanyu Chatterjee, in one of the novels that I will discuss (it is, unfortunately, not available in Canada), English, August: An Indian Story tells the story of August, a young man from a privileged urban background, in his first year as a probationer in the elite cadre of the Indian bureaucracy, the Indian Administrative Service. It is a classic ‘coming of age’ novel, and for its evocation of the experience of youth in modern India certainly stands comparison with the work of an anthropologist, such as that of Craig Jeffrey in his highly regarded ethnography, Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting (2010). Chatterjee’s book is also about how district administration works in India, and about the relations of city and country.

The lectures for this course will provide contextual background for each of the novels, drawing on relevant work by historians and social scientists. Several films will also be shown, for discussion.
Assessment will involve you in writing a ‘Reader’s Diary’/’Reading Notes’, and three essays.

The novels (all available, in various editions, reasonably cheaply through AbeBooks or Amazon):

Raja Rao (1938) *Kanthapura*

Khushwant Singh (1956) *Train to Pakistan*

Arundhati Roy (1997) *The God of Small Things*

Rohinton Mistry (1995) *A Fine Balance*

Katherine Boo (2012) *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*


Arundhati Roy (2017) *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Other works by writers from South Asia or of South Asian origin or based on experience of life in the Subcontinent include:

Aravind Adiga (2008) *White Tiger*

Mulk Raj Anand (1935) *Untouchable*

Mulk Raj Anand (1936) *Coolie*

Upamanyu Chatterjee (1988) *English, August: An Indian Story*

Mohsin Hamid (2008) *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Gregory David Roberts (2003) *Shantaram*


Vikram Seth (1993) *A Suitable Boy*

Shrilal Shukla (1968 Hindi; 1992 English translation, by Gillian Wright) *Raag Darbari*

Bapsi Sidhwa (1991) *Cracking India*
SCHEDULE

Week One (Wednesday September 6\textsuperscript{th})

(i) Introduction: Why read novels?
(ii) Caste and South Asian Society

Reading: ‘Caste’ and ‘Dalit’ and ‘Modern, Modernity’ from *Keywords for Modern India* by Craig Jeffrey and John Harriss (Oxford University Press 2014)

(iii) Gandhi and the Struggle for Independence (a brief introduction)

Reading: ‘Gandhi’ from *Keywords*

Week Two (Wednesday September 13\textsuperscript{th})

Watch the film ‘Gandhi’ (Best Picture 1982)

Week Three (Wednesday September 20\textsuperscript{th})

(i) Discussion of *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao
(ii) Partition: what was it all about?

Week Four (Wednesday September 27\textsuperscript{th})

(i) Discussion of *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh
(ii) Watch the film ‘Khamosh Pani’

Week Five (Wednesday October 4\textsuperscript{th})

(i) Fast forward: what happened to Pakistan?
Discussion of the section on ‘Politics’ in Mohsin Hamid’s *Discontent and its Civilizations*, particularly the short pieces ‘After Sixty Years, Will Pakistan Be Reborn?’ and ‘Why They Get Pakistan Wrong’

(iii) Nehru’s India

Reading: ‘Nehru’, ‘Congress’, ‘(The) Constitution’, ‘Democracy’ from *Keywords*

Friday October 6th 5.00pm **SUBMIT FIRST ESSAY** (On *Kanthapura* and *Train to Pakistan*) [2500-3000 words]

**Week Six** (Wednesday October 11th)

Discussion of *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy

**Week Seven** (Wednesday October 18th)


**Week Eight** (Wednesday October 25th)

Discussion of *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry

**Week Nine** (Wednesday November 1st)

South Asia Reinvented: India and Pakistan from the 1990s

Reading: ‘city’, ‘middle class’, ‘neo-liberalism’, from *Keywords*

Friday November 3rd 5.00 pm **SUBMIT SECOND ESSAY** (On *God of Small Things and A Fine Balance*) [2500 to 3000 words]

**Week Ten** (Wednesday November 8th)

Discussion of *Behind The Beautiful Forevers* by Katherine Boo
**Week Eleven** (Wednesday November 15\textsuperscript{th})

Discussion of *How To Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* by Mohsin Hamid (and see Hamid’s autobiographical writing, in the part on ‘Life’, in Discontent and Its Civilizations)

**Week Twelve** (Wednesday November 22\textsuperscript{nd})

Rounding Up: How is contemporary South Asia represented by novelists?

**Week Thirteen** (Wednesday November 29\textsuperscript{th})

Discussion of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy

Wednesday December 13\textsuperscript{th} 5.00 pm **SUBMIT THIRD ESSAY** (On How contemporary South Asian society is represented by novelists) [4000 words]

**Assessment:**

Completion of the course requires writing three essays, and the submission of a ‘Reader’s Diary’/Reading Notes, in which I will expect to read notes from your reading of each of the novels. The weighting of the various assignments is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Reader’s Diary’</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 3 ('Final Essay')</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I need not remind you, I hope, of SFU policy on plagiarism
A Note on the Reader’s Diary/Reading Notes:

Careful reading, even of a novel, means making some notes as you go along, about developments in the plot, significant events, passages that are revealing about a character, or where the writer is commenting on a particular theme. And notes, too, about your reaction to the novel. The notes needed necessarily be very detailed.

Here is an example, from my own notes on reading *Train to Pakistan* (remember that the page numbers in my copy of the text may not be the same in yours):

“p. 47 description of rural India
p. 48 Iqbal meditation on the population problem
   NB: relations of intelligentsia and rural people
p. 51 account of the achievement of independence
   what is freedom for?
   Experience of colonialism
p. 54 Iqbal reflections on the impossibility of revolution
   Iqbal’s arrest
p. 59 Arrest of Jugga
   → exchanges between police and Jugga
p. 75 NB: inequality
p. 76 marriage advertisements!

p.80 Pt 2 Kalyug

p. 89 arrival of train from Pakistan
   horror seen from the village
   Hukum Chand’s experience of it
p. 95 description of the monsoon”