

**Department of Sociology**  
**Faculty of Social Sciences**  
**South Asian University - New Delhi**

***Violence and Suffering***

(Optional Course for MA)

Total Credits: 4

**Objectives of the Course**

Violence and suffering has been an endemic feature of social and political life. Even if we regard our lives untouched by violence, images of suffering and pain are close at hand. This course will introduce students to the anthropology and sociology of Violence, Conflict and Suffering. Many courses and topics of interest in Sociology and Anthropology have touched upon violence. For example, the sociology of Ethnicity and Nationalism often raises a concern and interest in ethnic and communal conflict and violence. Studies on Diasporas and Transnationalism and Economic sociology often touch upon the suffering caused by displacement, neo-liberal policies and costly mechanisms for maintaining the sanctity of national borders. Moments of violence and suffering are also implicated in questions of representation and the symbols with which we comprehend the world. Violence and Suffering is thus a framework for approaching the world.

The purpose of this course is to encourage students to question and challenge the meaning of violence and suffering and to not regard it as something 'natural'. Students will explore violence and suffering not only in terms of the extraordinary and the eventful but also as emerging from and being a part of everyday life. In the process students will be introduced to ways that will enable them to see violence and suffering, not merely as an aberration of normal life, but as a part of and producing notions of normality. The course treats violence and suffering as both produced by and producing the state, society, culture and politics.

The course will pay close attention to cases and will maintain an interest in the ways situations of violence and suffering are perceived and documented in different forms before attempts to generalise and theorise are made. While the course will implicitly attend to concerns of violence and suffering in the Sociology of South Asia, students will also be encouraged to think critically about regional and global concerns.

**Unit 1: Introduction.**

What is violence? What is the Tension between ordinary and normal life with extraordinary violence? What are the levels of violence and suffering? How has violence been commonly approached and apprehended? How has violence and Suffering been understood in the modern world (the colonial/post-colonial transition) and in the social sciences? The initial inability of Anthropologists and Sociologists in approaching violence will also be explored until the emergence of studies of violence over the last thirty years.

Taussig, Michael. 1984. Culture of Terror--Space of Death. Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26(3): 467-49

Das, Veena. 1995. *Critical Events: an Anthropological perspective on contemporary India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press

Taussig, Michael. 1992. *The Nervous System*. London: Routledge

Aretxaga, Begona. 2003. Maddening States. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32: 393-410

Vajpeyi, Ananya. 2007. *Prolegomena to the Study of People and Places in Violent India*. New Delhi: WISCOMP

Devji, Faisal. 2021. The Return of Non Violence. *Critical Times* 4(1): 93-101

## **Unit 2: The Body in Pain**

How do we approach the experience of violence and suffering? What sort of a vector is the human body in understanding the experience of violence and pain? How do societies treat the violated and suffering body? What effect does the violated and suffering body have on socio-cultural formations and representations? How do we approach notions of well-being in contrast to the suffering and violated body? How is gender implicated in discussions of the violated body?

Foucault, Michel. 1984. The body of the condemned. In Rabinow, Paul (ed.) *The Foucault Reader: an introduction to Foucault's thought*. Pp 170-178 New York Penguin

Rose, Nikolas. 2001. The Politics of Life Itself. *Theory, Culture, Society* 18(1): 1-30

Fassin, Didier. 2010. Ethics of Survival: A democratic approach to the politics of life. *Humanity: International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism and Development* 1(1): 81-95

Das, Veena. 1997. Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain. In Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock (eds.) *Social Suffering* . New Delhi: OUP Also available on Jstor ,Das, Veena. 1996. Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain. *Daedalus* 125(1): 67-91

Aretxaga, Begona. 1995. Dirty Protest: symbolic overdetermination and gender in Northern Ireland Ethnic violence *Ethos* 23(2): 123-148

## **Unit 3: Structural Violence, Political Economy and State violence**

This unit aims to look at the forms of violence and suffering seen across the world. Structural inequalities, economic changes and downturns, poverty and resultant problems of crime are often sources of much violence and suffering. However unlike situations of war and conflict, they often remain hidden and caught in everyday functioning of the political economy. How do we approach violence and suffering that recognises the impact of the inequities of political economy and in the context of everyday life?

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2004. Two Feet Under and a cardboard coffin: The social production of indifference to child death. In Phillippe Bourgois and Nancy Sheper-Hughes (eds.) *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*. Pp. 275-281. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Bourgois, Phillippe. 2003. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Biehl, Joao. *Vita: Life in a zone of social Abandonment*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Bourgois, Phillippe. 2009. Recognizing Invisible Violence. In Barbara Rylko-Bauer, Linda Whiteford, and Paul Farmer, eds. *Global Health in Times of Violence*. Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press. Pages 18-41-This is a very useful background reading.

Galtung, Johan. 1969. Violence, Peace and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research* 6(3): 167-191. Useful for definitions of structural violence

Benjamin, Walter. 1968. Critique of Violence. In *Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books

Aretxaga, Begona. 2003. Maddening States. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32: 393-410

Alpa Shah. 2006. Markets of Protection: The 'Terrorist' Maoist Movement and the State in Jharkhand, India. *Critique of Anthropology* 26 (3): 297-314

Gilles Dorransoro, 2007. Kabul at War (1992-1996): State, Ethnicity and Social Classes , *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* [Online], URL : <http://samaj.revues.org/212>

Asad, Talal. 2008. On Suicide Bombing. *The Arab Studies Journal* 2(1): 123-130

#### **Unit 4: Violence as a Creative Force-Subjectivities**

How does violence and suffering create forms of culture and sociality? How do they shape our mechanisms and arts of representation? Does violence and suffering create new notions of self-hood and sociality?

Daniel, E. Valentine. 1996. *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Das, Veena. 2000. The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Poisonous Knowledge and Subjectivity. In Veena Das, Arthur Klienman, Mamphela Ramphele and Pamela Reynolds (eds.). *Violence and Subjectivity*. Pp 205-225. Berkeley: University of California Press

Jeffery, Laura and Matti Candea. 2006. The Politics of Victimhood. *History and Anthropology* 17(4): 287-296

Crapanzano, Vincent. 2011. *Harkis: The wound that never heals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Biehl, Joao, Byron Good and Arthur Kleinman (eds.). 2007. *Subjectivities: Ethnographic Investigations*. Los Angeles: University of California Press

### **Unit 5: Gender, Violence and Suffering**

Scholars are increasingly aware of the need to approach the experience of violence and suffering through the framework of gender. What does a gendered approach to the anthropological and sociological study of violence and suffering entail? To what extent is violence and suffering mediated and differentiated by gender?

Mukherjee, Nayanika. 2006. Remembering to Forget: Public Secrecy and Memory of Sexual Violence in Bangladesh. *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* 12 (2): 433-450

Sen, Atreyee. 2007. *Shiv Sena Women: violence and communalism in a Bombay slum*. Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press

Sen, Atreyee. 2018. Security and Purity: Female Surveillance, Child Vigilantism, and the Moral Policing of Deviant Women in Two Radicalized Indian Slums, *Current Anthropology*, 59(5): 549-571

Ramphele, Mamphela. 2000. Teach me how to be a man: an exploration of the definition of masculinity. In Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele and Pamela Reynolds (eds). *Violence and Subjectivity*. Los Angeles: University of California Press

Das, Veena. 2008. Violence, Gender and Subjectivity. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37: 283-299

### **Unit 6: Approaching Catastrophe: Genocides, holocaust and ethnic cleansing**

The history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and after has often been marked by events of mass trauma and violence such as the holocaust in Europe during the Second World War and genocidal events taking place after, especially in Eastern Europe and Central Africa. But what do we mean by terms such as Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing? What kind of events do we identify as genocide? What kind of a shadow has an event such as the Jewish Holocaust cast on the way we conceive of violence, suffering and the very question of what it means to be a human? This unit will explore this questions as well discussing and interrogating the question of catastrophe and exceptional violence.

Lemkin, Raphael. 2009. "Genocide: A modern crime". In Samuel Totten and Paul Bartop (eds.) *The Genocide Studies reader*. New York: Routledge

Levi Primo. 1989. *The Drowned and the Saved*. London: Vintage

Rothberg, Michael. 2009. *Multi-Directional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonisation*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press

Sanford, Victoria. 2009. What is the Anthropology of Genocide?: Reflections on Field Research with Maya survivors in Guatemala. In Alexander Laban Hinton and Kevin Lewis O'Neil (ed.) *Genocide: Truth, Memory and Representation*. Pp29-53. Durham: Duke University Press.

Taylor, Christopher. 2009. Rwandan Genocide: Towards an explanation in which history and culture matter. Patricia McNanny and Norman Yoffee (eds.) *Questioning Collapse: Human Resilience, Ecological Vulnerability, and the Aftermath of Empire*. Pp 239-268. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Hinton, Alexander. 1998. Why Did You Kill?: The Cambodian Genocide and the Dark Side of Face and Honor. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57 (1): 93-122

### **Unit 7: Ethnic and Communal Violence**

Communal and Ethnic conflict has been a hallmark of human life in a nation-state, especially in South Asia. This unit will feature critical readings of communal rioting and violence and will attempt to show how communal riots, mobs and crowds are not aberrations but perhaps a part of life in democracies and nation-states.

Spencer, Jonathan. 1992. Problems in the Analysis of Communal Violence. *Contributions to Indian Sociology New Series* 26(2): 261-279

Spencer, Jonathan. 1990. Collective Violence and Everyday Practice in Sri Lanka. *Modern Asian Studies*. 24(3): 603-623

Spencer, Jonathan. 2007. *Anthropology, Politics and the State: Democracy and Violence in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Tambiah, Stanley. 1997. *Levelling Crowds: Ethno-nationalist conflicts and collective violence in South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Hansen, Thomas Blom. 2001. *Urban Violence in India: Identity Politics, Mumbai and the Post-Colonial City*. New Delhi: Permanent Black

Verkaaik, Oskar. 2004. *Migrants and Militants: Fun and Urban violence in Pakistan*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press

Khan, Naveeda. 2010. Mosque Construction, Or the Violence of the Ordinary. In Naveeda Khan (ed) *Beyond Crisis: Reevaluating Pakistan*. Pp 482-518 London: Routledge

### **Unit 8: War, Conflict and Militarisation**

War, Conflict and Militarisation are topics that have been extensively studied in various disciplines. Within anthropology and sociology, there has been a new critical engagement, attempting to look at the meaning and life of communities affected by war and militarisation. In South Asia, most studies of violence have tended to focus on communal conflict and the riot as the primary method and event of violence. However the aim of this unit is to introduce students to a new way to think about war and militarisation of space. What happens to communities recovering from war after peace? What is life like for communities that remain trapped in militarised areas? What effect does war and militarisation have on sociality and selfhood? What can an anthropology or sociology of war offer?

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2001. Wars of the Globalisation Era: *European Journal of Social Theory* 4(1): 11-28

Balibar, Etienne. 2008. What's in a War? Politics as War, War as Politics. *Ratio Juris*. 21 (3): 365-86

Duschinski, Haley. 2009. Destiny Effects: Militarization, State Power, and Punitive Containment in Kashmir Valley. *Anthropological Quarterly* 82(3): 691-718.

Allen, Lori. 2008 Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada. *Cultural Anthropology* 23(3): 453-487,

Hoffman, Daniel 2007. The City as Barracks: Freetown, Monrovia and the Organization of Violence in Postcolonial African Cities *Cultural Anthropology* 22(3): 400-428

Pettigrew, Judith. 2009. Guns, Kinship and Fear: Maoists among the Tamu-mai (Gurungs). In D.N. Gellner (ed) *Resistance and the State: Nepalese Experiences*. Social Science Press: New Delhi

Kwon, Heonik. 2008. *Ghosts of War in Vietnam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Thiranagama, Sharika. 2007 "A New Morning? Reoccupying home in the aftermath of violence in Sri Lanka" *Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 49, No. 1:45-61*.

Hoffman, Daniel and Steven Lubkeman 2005. Warscape Ethnography in West Africa and the Anthropology of Events *Anthropological Quarterly* 78(2): 315-326

### **Unit 9: Documenting Violence and Suffering**

What are the challenges and dilemmas in documenting situations and experiences of violence and suffering? What is the social and political life of representations of violence and suffering? We shall look news reports, ethnographic accounts, art, monuments and practices of commemoration. We shall also look at the work of Truth and Reconciliation Committees. What can sociology and anthropology offer to this discussion?

Kleinman, Arthur and Joan Kleinman. 1997. The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay or Images: Cultural appropriations of suffering in our times. In Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock (eds.) *Social Suffering*. New Delhi: OUP

Das, Veena. 1990. Our Work to Cry: Your Work to listen. In Veena Das (ed.) *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press-see offprint

Feldman, Allen. 1994. On Cultural Anaesthesia: From Desert Storm to Rodney King. *American Ethnologist* 21(2): 404-418

Sen, Atreyee. 2004. Mumbai slums and the search for 'a heart': ethics, ethnography and the dilemmas of studying Urban Violence *Anthropology Matters*, 6(1). Search in [www.anthropologymatters.com](http://www.anthropologymatters.com)