Introduction and Summary of Course. This discussion-focused, seminar-style course will focus on a close reading of modern and contemporary South Asian novels and short stories structured around the theme of “partition(s),” not only the historical events of the partition of Bengal in 1905 (East Pakistan, eventually Bangladesh), India’s Partition in 1947, or the social catastrophe of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency in the 1970’s, but the long shadows of these events right up to the (social, political) present. We will focus on many “figures of partition,” personal, religious, and political, in Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, and English prose literatures of India and Pakistan. All works are written in India and Pakistan about India, Pakistan. Themes will range from religion and politics, gender/power; sexuality; love within and outside of the family; women, honor, and seclusion; asceticism and eroticism; caste, class, ethnicity, and race; children and their social and politics vulnerabilities; and love, politics, and inter-caste marriage in Hindu, Parsee, Sikh, Muslim, and Christian settings in South Asia. Authors include Rabindranath Tagore, Khushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, Lalitambika Antharjanam, Perumal Murugan, and Arundhati Roy.

We will begin with the Bengali worlds of Rabindranath Tagore’s early modernist novel Ghare Baire (The Within and the Outside; Home and the World), set during the time of the rise of Hindu nationalist sentiments during the Swadeshi or “self-rule” movement (1903-1908), Lord Curzon’s proposal to partition Bengal, and Tagore’s opposition to
Gandhi’s Swaraj, dramatized by the conflicted relationships between Nikhil’s “reformer’s” cool rational cosmopolitanism, Sandeep’s revolutionary, nationalist “fire,” and Bimala’s “auspiciousness” (repressed sexuality) and (violent, fiery) goddess “śakti” that symbolized for her erstwhile lover Sandeep the eroticized “body” of the new (Hindu) nation. Hindu and Muslim, gender, sexuality, nation-state. We then move on the earliest novel about Indo-Pakistan Partition in 1947, from the Sikh perspective of Khushwant Singh, Train to Pakistan. Here too we have political changes and movements of the time depicted in vivid characters, politics narrativized and particularized through stories of love, violence, passion, religion, and betrayal, the Sikh thug turned hero Juggat and his Muslim lover Nooran; Iqbal the young (Sikh, Marxist) social worker-intellectual who appears to be Muslim, a political and emotional coward – there is the issue of his circumcision – marks on the male body become central themes in all of our novels -- the brutal Hindu Hukum Chand and his lower-caste dancer (Muslim) girlfriend Nareena who associates with hijras (transpersons who embody the bhakti spiritual truth of “neither Hindu nor Muslim”); the good Imam Baksh, father and Muslim community leader and the Sikh Gurus. Also the pivotal role played at the end of the novel by the Sikh scripture itself, another “person” or “character,” the Guru Granth Sahib: love, separation, violent flood, riots (political “dacoity”) and partition; the village (Mano Majra) and the town, and the Sutlej River in-between. We then turn to a Parsi view of Partition from Lahore, before and just after it becomes part of “Pakistan,” in Bapsi Sidhwa’s Cracking India.

The rich Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Parsi characters that surround the girl Lenny, whose body is twisted by polio, a wounded healer and also betrayer; the beautiful Ayah, the sexual/erotic body at the center of the novel, the life-force of love (and erotic community) that is crushed: Ayah – “Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are, as always, unified around her. I dive into Ayah’s lap . . .” And Ayah’s suitors, Masseur and the Ice-Candy-Man, the bird-seller turned crazy ecstatic Sufi Pir, leader of mobs, “dance-master,” pimp. We will chart the destinies of many characters that chart the painful fault-lines of Partition from the Parsi (“Pakistani”) side of things. We then turn to one of the modern classics of Partition literature, Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, the epic tale of Saleem Sinai, one of the children born at the stroke of midnight, August 14th, 1947 (perhaps, there is the matter of his “brother” Shiva, and the theme of faulted paternity). This is a novel of impossible scope, tracing social and political histories from Kashmir, the partition of Bengal, the 1947 Partition of India, to the Indo-Pakistan War to the Emergency area of the 1970s. Throughout the novel and the novel’s argument, people (characters) and places (also “characters”) are material symbols of partitions, gaps, holes, fragments, ectomy, cutting off; “sperectomy,” cutting off hope, and we will explore how history and politics are made vividly surreal through characters and their transformations: fission not fusion. To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world.

After the break, following Rushdie, we begin to move away from the historical Partition of 1947. We tackle another big novel, A Fine Balance by the Parsi writer Rohinton Mistry. This moves us forward into the 1970s with the atrocities of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency, the worlds of big city slums and the caste-conflicted village, the alienated and isolated student Maneck, his father and mother, the fate of his Himalayan town after Partition and Independence, Kohlah’s Cola and the Parsi cantonment world in the foothills of the Himalayas. And Dina Aunty, sister, wife, widow, friend, boss, the isolated
Parsi woman in the midst of social disasters of the Indira era, India ruled by the dreaded “Widow” Prime Minister and her infamous favorite son Sanjay; the village as character in the stories of Narayan and Ishvar, chamar boy turned tailors; Dukhi and Rupa; Uncle Ishvar and Omprakash; Ashraf Chacha the gentle humane Muslim tailor and his wife Mumtaz; Pandit Lalluram, the “Shit-Eating Brahmin” and Thakur Dharamsi, a hateful and violent village strong man become urban Hindu extremist.

We then shift to Sri Lanka with A. Sivanandan’s great historical novel *When Memory Dies*, which traces a variety of partitions before and after the independence of “Ceylon” from British rule in 1948, on the heals of the India/Pakistan Partition. It is a novel of politics, from the constant and uneasy shifting of positions on the Left and Right, the conservative tactics of the Ceylon National Congress and the compromises of the Labor Party, to the Sri Lankan Constitution and the disastrous Sinhala-only policy and linguistic ethnic partitions (the “Tamils” and the “Sinhalese” – where are the Muslims and Christians amid partitions?) and the rise of the Tamil Tigers Eelam Movement, suicide bombers and brutal civil war. Sivanandan charts the “befores” and “afters” of various boundaries/barriers/partitions, from the unsteady shifting ambiguities of place to hardened “territories;” from the fluid boundaries of villages, towns and cities to the flat territorial zones of the North and South, marked by language and “ethnic identity;” from the contested but fluid boundaries of religion and religiousness – Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, even “secular” – to boundaries hardened by religious nationalism, by language and “ethnic identity,” through the interweaving stories of families: the early generation of the 1920’s and 1930’s – the stories of Saha, Tissa and the “bastard” son Para – the middle generation of Saha’s son Rajan, who comes of age in 1948, and is witness to the post-colonial period of communal politics of “Sinhala Buddhist” and “Tamils” – the UNP, Banda’s Freedom Party, the personal power and corruption of post colonial Sinhalese nationalism. Book Three brings us to the brink of the civil war between the “Tamil” North and “Sinhalese” South in the early 1980’s with doomed hero Vijay – of mixed heritage, embodying multiple identities, his adopted Sinhalese mother and Tamil father, Rajan’s adopted son – the wives Lali and Manel, the love and “Tamil coolie girl” Meena, Ravi and Yogi, the Tamil rebels in process, and, at the end, Uncle Para, the bastard son who is a witness to so much that is lost, the one thread of true history that binds the novel, and the events – past, present and future – together. As Mrs. Bandara, one character, reflects near the end of the novel, “We lost our history once, and we are killing each other off trying to find it, and now we are losing it again.” Or Uncle Para to Vijay: “When memory dies, a people die.” “But what if we make up false memories?” “That’s worse, that’s murder.” Tensions: mixed marriages, multi-religious/multi-ethnic identities; from the plural, multi, to singular: Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, “Tamil,” Sinhala, Muslim Tamil, Plantation Tamil, Sinhala Buddhist ethnic “purity;” the countryside and the city; Village Time, village place, ethnic and national “territory.” Like many of our “partition” narratives – even Tagore’s early work - Sivanandan’s epic novel ends inconclusively, midstream, wavering, its future uncertain. What kinds of children are born after the “partitions?” A visionary future, however, small, ambiguous, fleeting? Who is worthy enough to have hope? And we perhaps remember the girl Jyoti and her infant boy at the end of Antharjanam’s “A Leaf in the Whirlwind” . . .
After this we go South India, exploring the themes of gender, sexuality (incest, particular passionate love), family, religion and politics; passionate love and male asceticism; the seclusion and control of women in polygamous households of high-caste Brahmins; the stigma of infertility and the vulnerabilities of children in novels that are rooted in Tamil Nadu and Kerala in South India. And a final three books about love and its painful “partitions:” Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* pursues the themes of the vulnerability of children, love of siblings, incest, and love and death across caste lines in Christian Kerala. Perumal Murugan’s tender *One Part Woman* is about passionate love (*ampu*) in marriage and social stigma of infertility and its tragic social and emotional consequences (invisible and very visible “partitions”) in village worlds of Konku Nadu. And finally, Arundhati Roy’s new novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, focuses on the enduring “Indo-Pak war” inside and outside, in the lives of hijras Aftab-Anjum, Saddam Hussain, and Saeeda in the Khwabghah and later in the Sufi-like dargah/graveyard refuge of the Jannat, the “Paradise” for the unconsolled; the abandoned children Zaineb and the two “Miss Jebeens;” and the passionate love “quaternity” of lovely and haunted Tilo, Musa, Naga, and Biblap Dasgupta, amid the terrors of India-occupied Kashmir: more “partitions” Christian, Hindu, and Muslim -- wounds left open, cuts, fragments, shards, but somehow luminous for its human measure and the irreducible particularities of enduring love and loving. At the end, the night sky and stars, and a one-thousand-year-old city, reflected in a poor but beloved child’s puddle of pee.

A tall order for certain, rich fare indeed for an undergraduate course, but a set of deeply transformative works of South Asian literature that weave together many common themes -- novels whose compositions range from 1916-1947, 1980, 1995, 2010, over a span of hundred years, to 2017.

**Requirements:** Attendance (of course, body and soul, śeṣa–śeṣin, without partition).

**Response papers:** Before each session a 1-2-page reflection on the reading, in whatever form you choose -- personal/creative, journal/poetry, expository/essay style, etc. You should focus in some detail on some specific themes/characters/situations in each reading (don’t lose track of the particulars of narrative), and include some questions (three-four or so) to guide our weekly discussion. In the literary spirit of the novels we’re reading. **Come each week with questions that you want to share with the class.**

I will provide detailed study questions for each week to help guide students in their reading of the novels.

**Term papers:** Two papers of 6-8 pages will be required. Both papers will have a draft date (I will read the first draft) and a final due date. One or both of these papers may be rewritten and turned in at the end of examination period.

1) **Paper One,** rolling deadline: March 18, Wednesday, to Friday March 20th, end of the day in the box outside my office.
2) The rolling deadline for **Paper Two** spans the last two weeks of classes: from Wednesday, April 22 to Friday May 1st, by the end of the day in the box outside of my office.

I will read the papers, and try to get them back to students within a reasonable time-frame. Rewrites of both papers for the course will be due by the end of the Spring semester, Friday, May 15th, by the end of the day, in the box outside of my office, Pearson 209.

The thematic trajectory of this course -- love, family, class/caste, sexuality, religion and politics -- variously shaped by “partitions,” will be guided by your interests, for I hope that what we read will have enough focus to help you construct a meaningful term papers. Perhaps it might be useful to compare two or more authors in the final paper, or include an author’s work not included in the course, such as Amit Majmudar’s *Partitions*. Students are also encouraged to integrate, in a critical fashion, films that have been made based on some of the novels we will be reading (see syllabus for citations). One can find clues, for instance, to critical analysis in the essays surrounding Antharjanam’s novel *Agnisakshi*. Those with South Asian backgrounds – Indian, Pakistani, or diaspora South Asian -- are encouraged to explore paper ideas that integrate “field-work” and/or extensive interviews with family, ideally with multiple generations.

Asterisks ** in the syllabus below indicates readings available on the Moodle online course web site, under the heading Course Documents. All other readings are either assigned required readings or books on reserve.

**Semester Schedule**

**I. Partitions, Transgressions, Lament, and Shared Spaces**

**Week I**

**Wednesday, January 22:**
Territories, Partitions, Gender, and the Dislocation of Place: Introduction to the Course
First introductory readings:

**David Gilmartin, “Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Nov. 1998), pp. 1068-1095. (Skim, we will return to this essay several times later in the semester)

II. Fire, the Good Husband, and the Goddess: Gender, Sexuality, Nationalism, and Violence in Pre-Independence Bengal

Week II

Wednesday, January 29:
Tagore’s Home and the World
Reading:


We will begin the course with an early book that deals in profound ways with religion, gender and politics, Rabindranath Tagore’s *Home and the World* (1916), a classic that focuses on three rather archetypal characters during the volatile swadeshi period. The Penguin edition with Anita Desai’s forward is ideal.

Optional supplementary film: the fine Satyajit Ray film of *Home and the World*, *Ghare-Baire*, 1985. 2hr. 20min. In Bengali. Criterion Collection (with subtitles) or YouTube. Ray is a great artist, and so important for Bengali literature and cinema. The *Apu* cycle of films is golden.

III. Partition and the Train to Pakistan: Love, Politics, and Revenge in the Punjab

Week III

Wednesday, February 5:
Love and Death in Partition: From Dacioty to the Political Massacre of the Kaliyug
Reading:

Background Reading on the history of the freedom movement and the “Partition” of 1947: “The Freedom Movement and the Partition of India,” in Kulke and Rothermund, A History of India: 276-312 (for the week, skim; read entire chapter for the semester)

Love, politics, and revenge in Partition-era Punjab. This is the earliest novel about the Partition of India in 1947, and the creation, overnight, of Pakistan, the largest migrations of humans in history. Singh vividly depicts village Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus just before and just after the catastrophe of Partition, lovers, petty thieves, city intellectuals, artist singers, low caste dancers, radicals, imams and gurus. We will explore the depth of each character, in town and village, particularly the hero Juggut Singhji, his Muslim girlfriend Nooran, but also explore the particularly Sikh perspective of Singh’s novel, particularly the role of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh sacred scripture, in an act of love, sacrifice, and heroism, in the very last pages of the book.


IV. A Parsee Girl in her Ayah’s Lap: Parsee, Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim in Lahore

Week IV & V

Wednesday, February 12:
A Parsi Girl’s Story of Partition, Love and Death, and Betrayal
Reading:


Optional Supplementary Film: the Deepa Mehta film “Earth,” 1989, 1hr 41min, in English, written in collaboration with Bapsi Sidhwa. Movie covers about 3/4 of the novel’s narrative, bypassing the later story of Ayah. We can use the novel and the film to interrogate a variety of important issues. Film available on YouTube/Netflix.
Optional readings for papers: ** Dorothy Barenscott, “ ‘This is our Holocaust’: Deepa Mehta’s *Earth* and the Question of Partition Trauma,” *Mediascape*, 2006; ** Bilal Quareshi, “The Discomforting Legacy of Deepa Mehta’s Earth,” *Film Quarterly*, June 12, 2017 (interview).

** Wednesday, February 19:**
From Ayah’s Lap to “Toba Tek Singh” and “Open.” Sidhwa’s Lahore and some Manto stories.
Reading:
Sidhwa, *Cracking India*, continued;


** review Gilmartin, “Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History,” his reading of Toba Tek Singh, and his ideas about *territory*, locale, *place*, and the “dislocation of place.”

V. Magical Realism and the Children of Midnight:
Partitions and Phantasms
in Salman Rushdie

** Week VI & VII **

** Wednesday, February 26:**
Reading:

This vast and crazed and phantasmagorical visionary work of fiction, a modern “epic” structured on the model of multiple layers of traditional Indian narratives like the *Mahābhārata* or the *Purāṇas*, a dazzling chronotope embracing so much modern and contemporary (to the novel) Indian history, one great lament and witness of loss, the ululant fiction of a nation that embodies the “urge to encapsulate the whole of reality” in a work of art (Nadir Khan's painter friend or Lifafa Das’s Peepshow, “Dunya dekho, Dilhi dekho, Come and See, the whole world, come and see Delhi!” 83-84), from Kashmir lakes and Independence, Partition, to Indira's brutal Emergency, the Widow green and black, and the Widow's Hand draining the poor.

** Wednesday, March 4:**
Reading:
Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*, continued;

Paper one drafts welcome this week

Optional Supplemental film: *Midnight’s Children*, 2012, directed by Deepa Mehta. 2hr 28min, in English. YouTube/Netflix streaming. This is a radically abridged version of the monumental (and fundamentally untranslatable) novel.

Begin Reading Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* over break

Spring Break
March 6-16

VI. Balzac and Social Realism in Parsee Bombay:
From Partition to Emergency

Week VIII & IX

Wednesday, March 18:

Reading:
Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* 1995 (entire, for two weeks)

While Rushdie has always reminded me of Gabriel García Márquez, particularly in *his Cien Años del Solidad*, the Mistry reminds me not of Tolstoy, but above all of Balzac -- as the wonderful colophon from *Le Père Goriot* says, this novel of “great misfortunes” is not merely an author’s arbitrary “flight of fancy,” but “all is true.” A novel of social manners and a large canvas of characters -- vividly but objectively, almost indifferently, displayed -- and local vivid social-historical detail in the royal third person.

But this said, the Mistry is also about stories, about “fictions,” whole cloth or patches, fragments, life narratives cut here, truncated there, then sewn willy-nilly, many lives whose (necessarily) fragmentary narratives begin to take clearer shape and pattern when sewn into others’ lives, others’ pieces, to make a larger whole, even though it may ultimately be used as a cushion for the wooden platform on casters to ferry a legless sick beggar through the crowded streets of a great city by the sea. . .
See readings in Lurhmann (above) for Parsi background in the work of Mistry. Compare/contrast with the religious worlds of Sidhwa.

**Wednesday, March 18, Paper One Rolling Deadline:**
**in class or by Friday March 20**

**Wednesday, March 25:**
Reading: Mistry, continued.

**Optional Reading:** **Gyanendra Pandey, “In Defense of the Fragment: Writing About Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today,” from Representations, No. 37. Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories (Winter, 1992): 27-55.**

**VII. When Memory Dies: Colonial and Post-Colonial Sri Lanka.**
Losing Memory, Losing Histories

**Weeks X-XI**

**Wednesday, April 1:**
**Forgotten Mornings. My Roots, No Rain**

**Wednesday, April 8:**
**False Memories**

**Supplemental Optional literary Reading:** **“Don’t Talk to Me About Matisse,” from Michael Ondaatje, *Running in the Family*, pp. 63-101 (poems and narrative memoir). (Also relevant to our Sri Lankan themes are Ondaatje’s novels Anil’s Ghost, 2000, The Cat’s Table, 2011, and Handwriting: Poems, 1998).** In an ideal world, Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994). Also, Tissa Abeysekere, *Bringing Tony Home* (1998); the classic novels and stories of Martin Wickramasinghe (See Ape Gama: Lay Bare the Roots), and the play Kuveni by Henry Jayasena (1978), with its Buddhist themes.


VIII. “A Sister a Brother. A Woman a man. A twin a twin:”
Love and Death
Across Caste Lines in Christian Kerala

Week XII

Wednesday, April 15:
Reading:

Moving forward in time and south in geography, with a focus on themes of class, caste, and sexuality, Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things (1997), innocence, young love, and the anguish of childhood, set in Christian Kerala.

IX. Particular Love, Infertility, and Transgression in Marriage:
Tamil and Konku
Worlds of Perumal Murugan

Week XIII

Wednesday, April 22:
Reading:
Perumal Murugan, Mādhurbhāgan (One Part Woman) 2010; 2013. Entire.

In the Tamil/Konku world of gender, sexuality, family, caste, class, religion, and politics, there is the supremely gifted lyrical novelist Perumal Murugan. There are the quiet riches of Seasons of the Palm (Koolla Madari, 2001), about Untouchable Chakkili children and their śūdra masters; romantic love, caste conflict and human savagery in Pyre (Pookuzhi; Pūkuḷi, 2013); and this moving quietly tragic love story One Part Woman (Maadhur Bhaagan, 2010).


Week XIV

X. Indo-Pak War Inside and Outside:
Hijras, Abandoned Children, Kashmir.
Partitions Across Sex and Gender
Wednesday, April 29:
Hijras Among the Living Dead in the Martyr’s Dargah. Tilo, Musa, Naga and the Two Miss Jebeens: Love, Death, Children, and Kashmir’s Painful Partitions
Reading:


Rolling Deadlines for Paper Two: Wednesday April 22-Friday, April 1


Final rewrites for both papers due at the end of the spring term: Friday, May 15, in the box outside of my office

Required Books for the Course

Kushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan*
Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India (The Ice-Candy Man)*
Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*
Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance*
A. Sivanandan, *When Memory Dies*
Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*
Perumal Murugan, *One Part Woman*
Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

All other optional or required readings are marked by asterisks ** and are available on the Moodle Site for the course
Optional Addendum: Other Readings in the eye of God(s)d(ess)es

There are other sources in Indian writing, including the plays of Girish Karnad, the Kannada poems and biographical narratives of A.K. Ramanujan, Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1963) about the fate of a Karnataka village and villagers during the Gandhi Satyagraha period before Independence, and Anita Desai’s subtle and deeply moving account of Anglo Indians in old Delhi, The Clear Light of Morning (1990).