

LT226 Tutors of History: Narrating South Asia in Fiction

Seminar Leader: Saskya Jain
Email: s.jain@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course introduces the multi-layered postcolonial histories of South Asia through its recent literature, moving beyond the names of the few well-known figures from these literatures typically familiar to a Western readership. Through fiction, we will explore key moments such as Partition and its aftermath in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the civil wars in Nepal and Sri Lanka, the insurgency in India's Northeast, the displacement of indigenous populations and the Naxalite movement in India, and the migration of labor from South India to the Middle East. Making sense of this world through stories, we will read our way into the region's own modernity—made even more complex by economic shifts, climate change and urbanization—which brings with it a new understanding of global dynamics. The reading list will include texts (written originally in English or translated from South Asian languages) by writers such as Geetanjali Shree, Akhtaruzzaman Elias, Manjushree Thapa, Shehan Karunatilaka, Aruni Kashyap, Mohammad Hanif and Sheela Tomy. We will consider how these authors offer an intimate access to individual and collective experience through close reading and attention to elements of literary form and style, such as structure, character, narrative voice, dialogue, sentences and paragraphs, profluousness, etc. Concomitantly, this course also introduces students to the vibrant world of publishing, with a special focus on South Asia and translation, by exploring the dynamics of publishing and circulation, as well as the formats, forums and opportunities available (or not) to aspiring writers.

Requirements

All assigned texts are to be prepared before each seminar meeting. Ideally, read the physical book rather than a digital version. The physicality of the page, the pacing marked by the manual act of turning the page, and its visual makeup of lines, punctuation, paragraphing, dialogue, etc. are important to our process of close reading.

Active participation, including thoughtful, courteous interactions with each other, is expected of everyone. I will give you a set of questions to keep in mind as you read the assigned texts. These should make it easier for you to participate in discussions. Your contributions to discussion will be paramount. I will evaluate them based on depth, your ability to engage with material cumulatively, regularity and your individual progress. The course presumes no prior knowledge, so please jump in early and regularly with questions and comments.

There will be one written assignment: a final paper of 3500 words. The written assignment can either be an essay or a creative exploration of the topic in the form of a short story or memoir piece and will be due in two instalments.

Students are also expected to do two short in-class presentations of ten minutes (500 words) each introducing an author/book or topic that we are discussing.

There will be one in-class writing assignment of 500 words.

For more details, see 'Assessment & Assignments' below.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Learning in this class is cumulative, so missing classes without notice puts you at a disadvantage. If you must miss class with good reason, please let me know in advance. More than two absences will adversely affect your final grade.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment & Assignments

There will be one written assignment of 3500 words, due on December 3, 2025.
The first 1000 words of this assignment are due on October 15, 2024.

The written assignment can be an analytical paper on the assigned books/topics or creative explorations of a book/topic in the form of a short story or memoir piece. We will discuss these formats during our first session.

Students are also expected to do two short in-class presentations of 10 minutes (roughly 500 words, can be written as notes/bullet points) each introducing either the writer / text we are discussing or the historical context of the book. The in-class presentations will be assigned during our first session.

There will also be one in-class writing assignment of 500 words.

During our October 8 session, I will schedule one-on-one meetings with each of you to discuss your final papers.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Seminar preparation & speaking in class weeks 1-7	15 %
Seminar preparation & speaking in class weeks 8-14	15 %
In-class presentation 1	10 %
In-class presentation 2	10 %
Early draft (1000 words) & in-class writing assignment	25 %
Final paper	25 %

Schedule

Wednesday, Sept. 3 9 AM - 12:15 PM	Introduction to the course
Wednesday, Sept. 10 9 AM - 12:15 PM	<i>Tomb of Sand</i> by Geetanjali Shree (transl. from Hindi by Daisy Rockwell) Assigned reading: Excerpt 1 from <i>Tomb of Sand</i>
Wednesday, Sept. 17 9 AM - 12:15 PM	Assigned reading: Excerpt 2 from <i>Tomb of Sand</i> In-class writing assignment
Wednesday, September 24 9 AM - 12:15 PM	<i>A Case of Exploding Mangoes</i> by Mohammed Hanif Assigned reading: Excerpt from <i>Mangoes</i> (Prologue & Part 1 "Life is in Allah's Hands But..:" (pp. 1-125)
Wednesday, October 1 9 AM - 12:15 PM	<i>In Other Rooms, Other Wonders</i> by Daniyal Mueenuddin Assigned reading: "Saleema" "Provide, Provide"
Wednesday, October 8 9 AM - 12:15 PM	<i>The Book of Dhaka</i> , ed. by Pushpita Alam & Arunava Sinha Assigned reading: "The Raincoat" by Akhteruzzaman Elias (trans. Q. Pushpita Alam) One-on-one meetings to discuss mid-term and final papers
Wednesday, October 15 9 AM - 12:15 PM EARLY DRAFT (1000 WORDS) DUE BY MIDNIGHT	<i>The Book of Dhaka</i> , ed. by Pushpita Alam & Arunava Sinha Assigned reading: "The Weapon" by Syed Manzoorul Islam (trans. Arunava Sinha) <i>How to Tell the Story of an Insurgency</i> , ed. by Aruni Kashyap Assigned reading: "Maryam" by Jayanta Saikia
Wednesday, October 22 9 AM - 12:15 PM	FALL BREAK / NO CLASS

Wednesday, October 29 9 AM - 12:15 PM	<i>The House with a Thousand Stories</i> by Aruni Kashyap Assigned reading: <i>The House with a Thousand Stories</i>
Wednesday, November 5 9 AM - 12:15 PM	<i>The Tutor of History</i> by Manjushree Thapa Assigned reading: Excerpt from <i>Tutor of History</i>
Wednesday, November 12 9 AM - 12:15 PM	<i>Brotherless Night</i> by V.V. Ganeshananthan Assigned reading: Excerpt from <i>Brotherless Night</i>
Wednesday, November 19 9 AM - 12:15 PM	<i>The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida</i> by Shehan Karunatilaka Assigned reading: Excerpt from <i>Moons</i>
Wednesday, November 26 9 AM - 12:15 PM	<i>Valli</i> by Sheela Tomy (transl. from Malayalam by Jayashree Kalathil) Assigned reading: Excerpt from <i>Valli</i>
Wednesday, December 3 9 AM - 12:15 PM FINAL PAPER DUE BY MIDNIGHT	<i>Goat Days</i> by Benyamin (transl. from Malayalam by Joseph Koyippally) Assigned reading: <i>Goat Days</i>
Wednesday, December 10 9 AM - 12:15 PM	NO CLASS Instead: reading with Geetanjali Shree, date TBD, attendance compulsory

REQUIRED BOOKS FOR THIS COURSE:

You can check the BCB library reserve stocks or other public libraries for which of the books listed below are available there. Else, the following books will need to be purchased for this course. You can buy any English edition, new or used, but preferably the physical book, not the digital version. The physicality of the page, the pacing marked by the manual act of turning the page, and its visual makeup of lines, punctuation, paragraphing, dialogue, etc. are important to our process of close reading. If for some reason you are unable to get any of these books, please come and speak to me in person as soon as possible. Any additional reading material will be provided by me.

- (1) *Tomb of Sand* by Geetanjali Shree (transl. from Hindi by Daisy Rockwell)
- (2) *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* by Mohammed Hanif
- (3) *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin
- (4) *The Tutor of History* by Manjushree Thapa

- (5) *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by Shehan Karunatilaka
- (6) *Brotherless Night* by V.V. Ganeshanathan
- (7) *The House with a Thousand Stories* by Aruni Kashyap
- (8) *Goat Days* by Benyamin
- (9) *Valli* by Sheela Tomy (transl. from Malayalam by Jayashree Kalathil)