

Ambedkar University Delhi

Proposal for Launch of a Course

(To be approved by the Board of Studies and the Academic Council)

School/Centre proposing the course	School of Liberal Studies
Programme(s)	Sociology
Course title	Culture and Identity
Course code	
Credits	4
Course type (core/compulsory/optional/any other – please specify)	Core
Level (Predoctoral/MA/PG Diploma/Certificate/UG)	BA
Course coordinator and team	Prof. Smita Tewari Jassal

1. Does the course connect to, build on or overlap with any other courses offered in AUD?

The course on Culture and Identity introduces students to some theories, methods and approaches in the study of Culture. It does not conflict with any other courses offered in AUD, but connects to overall concerns around culture and identity – substantive topics that are taught by various faculty and units at AUD. This course is designed as an introductory, foundational course for students who may also build on this knowledge at the MA level in Sociology. This course ties in neatly with a more advanced MA course entitled “Culture, Hierarchy and Difference”.

2. Specific requirements on the part of students who can be admitted to this course: (Pre requisites; prior knowledge level; any others – please specify)  
There are no pre requisites for this course.
3. No. of students to be admitted (with justification if lower than usual cohort size is proposed):  
Usual cohort size for BA classes.
4. Course scheduling: (summer/winter course; semester-long course; half-semester course; workshop mode; seminar mode; any other – please specify)  
Semester-long course.
5. Proposed date of launch:  
Winter 2017.

6. How does the course link with the vision of AUD and the specific programme(s) where it is being offered?

Culture and Identity is integral to AUD's Sociology programme and draws on canonical texts from the disciplines of Social Anthropology and Sociology. In moving away from the focus on structure and function in mainstream sociological texts, this course is a necessary complement to existing undergraduate theory courses.

7. Course Details:

- a. Summary:

Since all human conduct is mediated by Culture, this course uncovers the bearing the concept has on everyday life. The sociological and ethnographic essays assembled for this course illustrate how cultures may be understood or "read" only in relation to given social structures with their own distinct histories. The course further emphasizes the notion of culture as the site where societal divisions and cleavages may be both established, and contested. Our particular effort will be to investigate ways in which "meanings" are selected, organized, and attributed to human phenomena. Through the reading selections, the concept's fluidity is underlined so that we steer away from notions of culture as fixed, timeless, and permanent. The course also interrogates the notion of spatially bounded cultures, and takes as a given that cultural difference is historically produced in shared and connected spaces, within given fields of power relations

In addition to learning about the theoretical and comparative perspectives it offers, the course will focus on the way the concept has enhanced understandings about identity. Like culture, identities are also always unfinished and in process. Apart from reviewing selected theories and approaches relating to the study of culture and cultural identity, we shall evaluate the contemporary relevance of these categories to understand how people produce and reproduce their social worlds besides inhabiting and making sense of them.

## b. Objective

A key aim of the course is to familiarize students with the history of the emergence of Social Anthropology as a discipline, in conjunction with the spread of colonialism. Several of the readings provide an opportunity to discuss these linkages.

A secondary aim will be to reflect on the two disciplinary foci – “social structure” and “culture” that have historically contributed to the divergent regional foci of the discipline of Social Anthropology.

While the concept of culture is key to understanding the ways of life of people or groups within particular periods, the course will also aim to focus on its intensely political potential.

Overall structure:

Lecture and discussion based.

### General Guidelines and Expectations

Students will read one or two original essays per week and come prepared for class discussions. Active class participation is a requirement of the course. In the first meeting of the week, the instructor will introduce the topic and contextualize the course reading. In the second meeting of the week, the format will change. A student will be called upon to lead the class discussion. This will be the occasion to raise questions and clarify knotty issues.

Frequently in the second meeting of the week, students will be expected to carry out an in-class writing exercise. The instructor may then request students to read out their pieces and discuss them. Often the class presentations will be based on short homework assignments. On other occasions the class will break up into small groups for self-study and discussion. An appointed group representative from each small group will then convey to the class the issues that the group discussed. The second meeting of the week is therefore designed as a critical component of the course in which the instructor will

a) evaluate student performance

- b) offer guidelines on academic writing
- c) impart information and ideas to supplement the class reading of the week.

The second meeting of the week is critical as 30 % of the class participation element of the course will be assessed here. Thus, attendance in this course is mandatory. As student evaluation will be ongoing and week-by-week, both through attendance monitoring, and the kinds of class exercises outlined above, there is no possibility whatsoever for students to hope to make up the course at the end of the semester. In case any student is likely to be absent from class on a particular day, please send an email to the instructor on the morning of the class meeting.

Contents (brief note on each module; indicative reading list with core and supplementary readings)

### **Module 1. Concept of Culture: Selected theories and approaches**

In the first Unit of three weeks, students are introduced to a wide-ranging set of perspectives on the notion of Culture. The unit will generate discussion on the very diversity of this conceptual category that defies neat definition. The module offers significant theories and approaches that will be of value throughout the course and beyond. In this module students will be introduced to ideas about colonial knowledge production and the specific kinds of texts that have characterized the early years of the discipline such as notions about the Other.

**Week 1.** Horace Miner (1956). Body Ritual among the Nacirema, *American Anthropologist* 58(3):503-507.

Matthew Arnold 1994 Culture and Anarchy in John Storey (ed). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, Pearson, Prentiss-Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. pp.3-11

Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. "Beyond "Culture": Space, identity, and the politics of difference." *Cultural Anthropology* 7.1 (1992): 6-23.

**Week 2.** Excerpts from Abu-Lughod, Lila 1986. *The Veiled Women*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

### **Week 3.** Pierre Bourdieu 1968 on The Berber House

Pierre Bourdieu 1986. on Cultural Capital, Chapter 8, Forms of Capital from Szeman Imre and Timothy Kaposy, *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, pp.82-88.

## **Module 2. National, Counter, Diasporic, and Resistant Cultures**

The second unit shifts to readings of specific cultures, namely National culture, Counter Culture, Diaspora Culture and Culture of Resistance. Each of the readings in this unit intensifies our understanding of the characteristics of culture as well as its historicity. This unit underlines Akhil Gupta's significant observation that cultures are never bounded, self-contained wholes, but can be located only in contexts of their economic interconnections and interdependence. Unit 2 will then force reflection on what makes for cultural distinctiveness, despite forces of capitalist expansion, colonialism, and strategies of effacement.

### **Week 4.** Frantz Fanon On National Culture from *The Wretched of the Earth*

Bakhtin, Mikhail. Carnival from *Rabelais and his World (excerpts)*

**Week 5** Stuart Hall 1990. Cultural Identity and Diaspora, from Rutherford John (ed). *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

**Week 6.** Signithia Fordham (1999). "Dissin' 'the Standard': Ebonics as Guerrilla Warfare at Capital High" *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 30(3):272-293.

## **Module 3. Processes of Identity Formation**

In Module Three we shift our attention to Identity and Process. Our aim is to examine how cultural identity might be forged. This unit examines processes of identity formation within different geographical contexts and time frames. This unit is prompted by Hall's understanding that cultural identity is a matter of 'being' as well as 'becoming' and in this sense it belongs as much to the past as the future. It cannot exist without reference to time, place, history and culture.

This Unit will also examine a masculine ballad from north India as a form of cultural production through which both gender and caste identity gets forged. We shall examine the range of cultural motifs found in the ballad that are relevant for sociology today. The unit provides the opportunity to reflect on at least one form of cultural production (a song genre) that facilitates identity formation.

**Week 7 .** Brodtkin Karen 1998. *How Jews Became White Folks and What that says about Race in America*, Rutgers University Press.

**Week 8.** Zerubavel, Yael. "The death of memory and the memory of death: Masada and the Holocaust as historical metaphors." *Representations* (1994): 72-100.

**Week 9.** Alter, Joseph S. 1992. *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in north India*, Berkeley: University of California Press (selected pages)

**Week 10.** Jassal, Smita Tewari 2012. *When Marriage is War in Unearthing Gender: Folksongs of North India*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Niranjana, Tejaswini 1998. "Left to the Imagination: Indian Nationalisms and Female Sexuality in Trinidad", in *A Question of Silence; The Sexual Economies of Modern India* edited by Mary John and Janaki Nair, 111-38, New Delhi: Kali for Women.

#### **Module 4. Politics, Identity and Cultural Symbolism**

In our concluding Module Four, we take up two examples of the connection between Identity and Politics. Contemporary Indian society is a veritable goldmine for the analysis of this issue and much has been written on the theme. However, for the purposes of this unit, we shall take up case studies relating to two contrasting political contexts. In the first, we learn how Gandhi understood the symbolic power of cloth and costume within the economic reality of colonial exploitation. The essay we read then will illustrate the strategies of a cultural actor. The second is about a political separatist movement in Ireland and the symbolic language mobilized. The contrasting universes in this unit are an opportunity to reflect on the symbolic and cultural forms mobilized in protest movements and the consequent sharpening of identities to meet political aims. The rootedness of

symbols within their distinct cultural contexts, and therefore, the relevance and appeal of the attendant symbolic language will be our central concern.

**Week 11.** Bean, Susan, 1988. "Gandhi and Khadi, The Fabric of Indian Independence" in Annette Weiner and Jane Schneider (eds.) *Cloth and the Human Experience*, Washington D.C. Smithsonian Inst. Press.

**Week 12.** Begoña Aretxaga (1995) "Dirty Protest: Symbolic Overdetermination and Gender in Northern Ireland Ethnic Violence" *Ethos* 23(2):123-148.

Jassal, Smita Tewari 2009 Criminals, Heroes, Martyrs: A Backward caste remembers the colonial past, In Rockel Stephen and Rick Halpern (eds.) *Inventing Collateral Damage: Civilian Casualties, War, and Empire*. Toronto: Between the Lines Press.

- b. Instructional design  
Lecture and discussion format
- c. Special needs (facilities, requirements in terms of software, studio, lab, clinic, library, classroom/others instructional space; any other – please specify)  
No special requirements
- d. Expertise in AUD faculty or outside  
AUD faculty.
- e. Linkages with external agencies (e.g., with field-based organizations, hospital; any others)  
No linkages with external agencies required.

### Assessment Structure

As outlined, the course is structured in such a way that readings build on each other. Hence, missing a class will set back the student considerably. In addition to class participation, there will be two in-class exams consisting of small quizzes and brief essays or paragraphs. Details of these exams will

be conveyed as the course progresses. However, as pointed out above, since evaluation of class performance will be ongoing and continuous, presence in the class is a critical component of the evaluation. The minimum required Class Attendance is 70%

Class participation and presentations 40%

Two class tests- mid term and final 60 %

**Signature of Course Coordinator(s)**

Note:

1. Modifications on the basis of deliberations in the Board of Studies may be incorporated and the revised proposal should be submitted to the Academic Council.
2. Courses which are meant to be part of more than one programme, and are to be shared across schools, may need to be taken through the Boards of Studies of the respective schools.
3. In certain special cases, where a course does not belong to any particular school, the proposal may be submitted directly to the Academic Council.

Recommendation of the School of Studies:

The proposal was discussed by the Board of Studies in its .....meeting held on.....and has been approved in the present form.

**Signature of the Dean of the School**