Himalayan Geography: History, Society, and Culture

Spring 2021, ANTH 0730
WEB Synchronous/Asynchronous
T, 8 – 9 am EST via Zoom

General Education Requirements:
Social Science
Specific Geographical Region

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Himalayan region is characterized by a tremendous range of social and cultural diversity that corresponds to climatic, ecological and geographical variation, as well as local and regional geopolitical factors. Historical change from the emergence of early forms of social complexity centered on chiefs and their forts – from which the regional designation of “Garhwal” takes its name – through the development of kingdoms and larger polities, shows the intimate link between geography, environment and socio-political transformation. Similarly, local language patterns, regional religious practices, musical styles, mythology, food culture, sartorial fashion, architectural design, agricultural and transportation technologies and engineering and trade networks have all been shaped by the structure of mountain barriers, bounded valley communities and bracketed lines of communication that follow river systems.

Whereas the political economy of the Himalayas has been structured around agricultural production, and the development of elaborate field terrace systems, there have also been subsidiary economies centered on trans-Himalayan trade and pilgrimage as well as pastoral nomadism and transhumance. Since the colonial period, the Himalayas have increasingly become a place for rest, relaxation, tourism and adventure, and this – along with further political transformations since Indian independence – has led to the rapid development of urban areas.

This course will provide a survey of Himalayan history, society and culture with a focus on the relationship between nature, the environment and geography.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

There are three interrelated learning objectives:

1. To develop an appreciation for the unique human geography of the Himalayas.
2. To develop an understanding of social and cultural diversity in the mountains of India, Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan.
3. To develop a critical perspective on the changing relationship between people and the environment in the Himalayan zone.

There are three learning outcomes. After taking the course

1. students will possess detailed knowledge about how mountain environments shape human society.
2. students will be able to explain the interrelationship between religious, economic, political and ecological factors that combine to define social institutions and cultural beliefs in the Himalayas.
3. students will develop skills to produce multi-media learning modules based on a critical understanding of environmental challenges faced by communities in the Himalayas.

TEXTS and READING ASSIGNMENTS

Required Texts:


Suggested Reading and Source Books


Michael Benanav (2018) *Himalaya Bound: One Family’s Quest to Save Their Animals and Ancient Way of Life*. New York: Pegasus


**OFFICE HOURS**

Given that students and the instructor will be on different time zones, office hours will be scheduled on an ad hoc basis by appointment. Please contact the instructor via email to make the necessary arrangements for a zoom meeting.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND FORMAT**

The course is delivered in a hybrid synchronous/asynchronous mode. All students meet together with the instructor for one hour per week via zoom meetings: Tuesday, 8 – 9 am EST.

**Synchronous:** Weekly synchronous meetings provide a framework for structured seminar discussion led by the instructor and student working groups. Weekly meetings build on curated multi-media modules developed by the instructor. Each week students engage with a new module after completing reading assignments that highlight specific topics, issues, problems and questions. After applying what has been learned to the mediated material in each module students will analyze and interpret their virtual experiences through structured discussion and debate.

**Asynchronous:** Each week students will spend 1.5 self-scheduled hours working through a pre-recorded, online, multi-media module focused thematically on a specific topic, issue, question or problem. Modules are prepared by the instructor using content that is uniquely produced for the course incorporating a wealth of material that is available online. Each module contains recorded, onsite guided tours, commentaries, analyses and interpretations that build on reading assignments by taking students on virtual trips to specific locations in the mountains.

**Canvas Course Interface:** The course is delivered by the University of Pittsburgh’s *Canvas* Learning Management System. Synchronous class meetings are scheduled and accessed via zoom meetings on the *Canvas* interface. The class syllabus and all other material including recorded modules are posted under the appropriate tab on the *Canvas* course page menu. All reading assignments that are not from the required texts (see above) are available as pdf copies that are posted along with each module, as appropriate.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

There are two integrated assignments that will be scored, an essay and a multi-media module.

**Essay (40 points):** Write a 3000-word essay using at least ten academic sources. The essay must be on a question or problem that is relevant to the course. The essay will provide the academic foundation for the multi-media module project. (Due Week 10)

**Multi-Media Module (40 points):** Using the multi-media modules produced for this course as models and as examples of how media can be combined, collect resources and produce one of
your own! The module you produce should build on the intellectual and academic foundation of the essay. (Due Week 14)

Attendance and Participation: (20 points)

Total: 100 points

GRADING:

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Policies of the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences:

Disability Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh’s Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators. To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the Academic Integrity Guide for an overview of the topic. For hands-on practice, complete the Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial.

Student Opinion of Teaching Surveys
Students in this class will be asked to complete a Student Opinion of Teaching Survey. Surveys will be sent via Pitt email and appear on your Canva landing page during the last three weeks of class meeting days. Your responses are anonymous. Please take time to thoughtfully respond, your feedback is important to me.

**Classroom Recording**

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student’s own private use.

**Accessibility**

Canvas is ADA Compliant and has fully implemented the final accessibility standards for electronic and information technology covered by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Please note that, due to the flexibility provided in this product, it is possible for some material to inadvertently fall outside of these guidelines.

**Copyright Notice**

These materials may be protected by copyright. United States copyright law, 17 USC section 101, et seq., in addition to University policy and procedures, prohibit unauthorized duplication or retransmission of course materials. See Library of Congress Copyright Office and the University Copyright Policy.

**Email Communication Policy:**

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Gmail, Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address. To forward e-mail sent to your University account, go to http://accounts.pitt.edu, log into your account, click on Edit Forwarding Addresses, and follow the instructions on the page. Be sure to log out of your account when you have finished. (For the full E-mail Communication Policy, go to www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html.)

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

**Week 1 – 1/18 – 1/22**

Synchronous: Introduction and Orientation
Asynchronous/Expeditions: Landour and Mussoorie: From Colonialism to Modern India  

**Week 2 – 1/25 – 1/29**

**Synchronous:** Overview of the Himalayas  
**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Geology and Topography of the “Third Pole”  
**Reading:** Pandit Chapter 3, *Intercontinental Biological Highway*; Zurick, Part 2, *Geology, Climate, Natural Hazards*.

**Week 3 – 2/1 – 2/5**

**Synchronous:** Political Histories and Political Ecology  
**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Forest Resources, Colonialism and the State; The Chipko Movement.  

**Week 4 – 2/8 – 2/12**

**Synchronous:** Modes of Production: The Economy of Agricultural Production  
**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Village Guided Tours, Farming, Domesticated Animals  
**Reading:** Pandit, Chapter 5, *The First Axe*; Zurick, Part 4, *Agriculture* and *Future Trends*.

**Week 5 – 2/15 – 2/19**

**Synchronous:** Family, Kinship, and Gender  
**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Marriage; Life Cycle Rituals; Gender and Labor  
**Reading:** Zurick, Part 3, *Population and Culture and Ethnicity*.

**Week 6 – 2/22 – 2/26**

**Synchronous:** Food and Culture  
**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Food, Festivals, and Offerings  
**Reading:** *TBD*

**Week 7 – 3/1 – 3/5**

**Synchronous:** Pilgrimage, Tourism, and Infrastructure of Transportation  
**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Pilgrimage; Tourism; Mountain Roads  
**Reading:** Pandit Chapter 7: *The First Train to Lhasa*; Zurick Part 4, *Transportation.*
Communication; Part 5, Pilgrimage and Sacred Exploration.

Week 8 – 3/8 – 3/12

**Synchronous:** Home of the Gods: Mythology and Geography

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Sacred Landscapes and Supernatural Forces; Healing Herbs and Divine Creatures.

**Reading:** TBD

Week 9 – 3/15 – 3/19

**Synchronous:** Sacred Rivers and Holy Water

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Ganga, Yamuna and Sacred Springs

**Reading:** TBD

Week 10 – 3/22 – 3/26

**Synchronous:** Ecology and Environmentalism

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Activism, Community Organizing and Conservation

**Reading:** Pandit, Chapter 9 and Chapter 10, Payback Time and Toward Sustainability.

Week 11 – 3/29 – 4/2

**Synchronous:** Tibet, India and Himalayan Geopolitics

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Tibet in Exile; The Dalai Lama;

**Reading:** TBD

Week 12 – 4/5 – 4/9

**Synchronous:** Trans-Himalayan Trade and Global Asia

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Trade Routes and Buddhist Pilgrims

**Reading:** Zurick Part 5, Early Foreign Exploration

Week 13 4/12 – 4/16

**Synchronous:** Urbanization: Nature and the Construction of Infrastructure

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Dams, Roads, and Mountain Cities: Uttarkashi and New Tehri

**Reading** Pandit, Chapter 8, Dam Rivers, Damn Rivers; Zurick, Part 3, Human Development and Migration and Urbanization.

Week 14 4/19 – 4/23

**Synchronous:** Conservation, National Parks and the WWF: Local, National and Global.

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Jabarkhet Nature Reserve, Corbett National Park, Rajaji National


Park


**BIBLIOGRAPHY – SOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY**

The bibliography attached to this syllabus is extensive and inclusive. Relevant scholarly articles and books are added on a semi regular basis. The goal is to produce a comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography that covers a range of topics, questions and problems that stem from the central focus of the course. The bibliography can guide you in pursuing more specialized topics for further study as well as in expanding your perspective on the interdisciplinary links produced by new research.

**Published between 2000 and 2020**


Diksha, and A. Kumar. 2017 Analysing urban sprawl and land consumption patterns in major capital cities in the Himalayan region using geoinformatics. Applied Geography 89:112-123.


Dyson, J.


Flora, N. V.

Galvin, S. S.

Gergan, M. D.
2020 Disastrous hydropower, uneven regional development, and decolonization in India's Eastern Himalayan borderlands. Political Geography 80.

Ghosh-Harihar, M., et al.
2019 Protected areas and biodiversity conservation in India. Biological Conservation 237:114-124.

Gohain, S.

Guyot-Rechard, B.

Kuniyal, J. C.

Lim, F. K. G.

Mathur, N.


Meena, H. R., et al.

Murali, R., S. Redpath, and C. Mishra
2017 The value of ecosystem services in the high altitude Spiti Valley, Indian Trans-Himalaya. Ecosystem Services 28:115-123.

Nepal, S. K.

Nichols, C.


Published Before 2000

29. Little, P.E., ENVIRONMENTS AND ENVIRONMENTALISMS IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL


Sainji Village – On the road from Mussoorie to Yammuna Bridge, north west slope of the Himalayan foothills.