

Histories of Regions : Early Modern Bengal, 16th-18th centuries

Credit distribution, Eligibility and Pre-requisites of the Course

Course title & Code	Credits	Credit distribution of the course			Eligibility criteria	Pre-requisite of the course (if any)
		Lecture	Tutorial	Practical/ Practice		
Histories of Regions I: Early Modern Bengal, 16th-18th centuries	4	3	1	0		

Course Objectives

This course aims to recover regions in Indian history. It engages with the concept of a region as a historically constituted entity. It explores the frameworks of *regional histories* and the *histories of regions* in Indian history writing, as related but distinct categories. It views regions in relation to larger historical entities, such as pan-regional empires, and areas of circulation of people, commodities, cultures, texts and ideas. The course is designed to illustrate some of the rubrics through which the history of a region has been discussed, selecting Bengal in early modern times as a case study. It could be extended to study other regions in different historical times. Its intent is to interest students in the histories of their own regions and encourage their research.

Learning Objectives:

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Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- See regions as historically constituted entities with varying limits that were different from modern regional boundaries.
- Appreciate the many components in the making of a region, especially natural, geographical factors. They will consider how areas were constituted into political regions in history and the challenges of military conquest and political control in Bengal in early modern times.
- Trace key developments in the regional economy and changing alignments between social classes, viewing the region of Bengal in the context of larger Indo-Gangetic and Indian Ocean worlds.
- Understand the development of a regional culture through linguistic, textual, architectural and artistic traditions and see their circulation over areas not necessarily coterminous with political boundaries.
- The course will equip students to place other regions in historical frameworks and seek to research the histories of lesser-known regions in India.

Syllabus

Unit 1 - Regional History and History of the Region - a historiographical review (11 Hours)

Unit 2 - Understanding the region (11 Hours)

Unit 3 - Economy and society (11 Hours)

Unit 4 – Culture (12 Hours)

Essential/recommended readings

Unit 1 - Regional History and History of the Region - a historiographical review

- Romila Thapar, 'Regional History: The Punjab', in *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 95-108.
- B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, Second Edition, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, Introduction-Passages from the Classical towards the Medieval, The Indian Experience, pp. 22-69.
- Bernard Cohn, 'Regions Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Society' in *The Bernard Cohn Omnibus*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 100-35.
- Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, Introduction, pp. 5-11.
- Samira Sheikh, *Forging A Region: Sultans, Traders, and Pilgrims in Gujarat, 1200-1500*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, Introduction, pp. 1-23.
- C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, Chapter 1, Patriotism and Political Ethics in Indian History, pp. 1-35; Chapter 2, The Consolidation of Indian Patrias and the Colonial Encounter, pp. 36-62

Unit 2 - Understanding the region

- a) The importance of topography/ecology
- b) Conquest and control

- Andre Wink, 'From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean: Medieval History in Geographical Perspective,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 44 (3), 2002, pp. 416-445.
- Jos J.L. Gommans, 'The Silent Frontier in South Asia, c. A.D. 1100-1800,' *Journal of World History*, Vol. 9 (1), 1998, pp. 1-23.
- Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, Chapter 1, Before the Turkish Conquest, pp. 13-27; Chapter 8, Riverine Changes and Economic Growth, pp. 213-16.
- Ranabir Chakravarti, *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society*, Third edition, New Delhi: Manohar 2021, Chapter 8, Seafaring in the Bengal Coast: The Early Medieval Scenario, pp. 160-186.
- Jos J.L. Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and the High Roads to Empire, 1500-1700*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, Chapter 1, The Indian Frontier, pp. 7-37.
- Pratyay Nath, *Climate of Conquest: War, Environment and Empire in Mughal North India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019, Chapter 2, Moving East, Moving West, The Bengal Delta, pp. 54-67.

Unit 3 - Economy and society

- a) Agrarian expansion
- b) Trade and trading communities
- c) British interventions in the political economy

- Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade,' in *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1700*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 96-127.
- Om Prakash, 'Trade and Politics in Eighteenth Century Bengal,' in Seema Alavi, ed., *The Eighteenth Century in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 136-64.
- Philip B. Calkins, 'The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal, 1700-1740,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1978, pp. 799-806.
- Rajat Datta, *Society, Economy and the Market: Commercialisation in Rural Bengal, c.1760-1800*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2000, Introduction, pp. 21-35; Chapter 4, The Agrarian Economy and the Dynamics of Commercial transactions, pp. 185-237.
- Dharma Kumar and Meghnad Desai, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. 2, 1757-1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 270-332.
- P.J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, Eastern India 1740-1828*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, Chapter 4, The New Regime, pp. 93-136.

- John R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in eighteenth-century Bengal*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, Introduction, pp. 3-36; Chapters 3 and 4, pp.45-95.

Unit 4 - Culture

- a) Literary cultures - Articulating a region; Speaking across spaces
- b) Visual cultures - Architectural innovations; Painting traditions

- Kuna I Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001, Chapter VII, The Making of the Regional Tradition of Bengal, pp. 288-337.
- Kumkum Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India: Persianisation and Mughal Culture in Bengal*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, Chapter 1, Mapping Early Modern Bengal: Polity, Culture and the Literary Universe, pp. 24-61, Chapter VII, Mughal Culture and Persianisation in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Bengal, pp. 215-45.
- Thibaut d'Hubert, 'Pirates, Poets and Merchants: Bengali Language and Literature in Seventeenth Century Mrauk-U,' in Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch, eds., *Culture and Circulation: Literature in Motion in Early Modern India*, Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2014, pp. 47-74.
- Tony K. Stewart, *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal*, New York: Oxford University Press, Introduction, pp. 3-21.
- Pika Ghosh, *Temples to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth Century Bengal*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005, Introduction, pp. 1-38; Chapter 2, A Paradigm Shift, pp. 65-107.
- Robert Skelton, 'Murshidabad Painting,' *Marg*, Vol. X, No. 1, 1956, pp. 10-22.
- Ratnabali Chatterjee, *From the Karkhana to the Studio: A Study in the Changing Social roles of Patron and Artist in Bengal*, New Delhi: Books and Books, 1990, Chapter 2, Murshidabad : The Artist and the Karkhana, pp. 10-44

Recommended readings

- Hermann Ku Ike and B.P. Sahu, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the State in Premodern India*, Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2022, Introduction, pp. 1-44.
- Jos Gommans, 'Burma at the Frontier of South, East and Southeast Asia: A Geographic Perspective,' in Jos Gommans and Jacques Leider, eds., *The Maritime Frontier of Burma: Exploring Political, Cultural and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200-1800*, Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2002, pp. 1-7.
- Radhika Chadha, *Merchants, Renegades Padres: Portuguese Presence in Early Modern Bengal*, New Delhi: Primus, 2025 (forthcoming), Chapter 1, The Geographical Setting: Coastal Bengala.

- Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, Berkeley University of California Press, 1996, Chapter 8, Islam and the Agrarian Order in the East, pp. 213-49.
- Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 24-34, 53-89.
- Holden Furber, 'Glimpses of Life and Trade on the Hugli, 1720-1770', in Rosane Rocher, ed., *Private Fortunes and Company Profits in the India Trade in the 18th Century*, Aldershot and Brookfield, Vermont: Varorium, 1997, Chapter IX, pp. 13-23.
- Jon Wison, *The Chaos of Empire: The British Raj and the Conquest of India*, New York: Public Affairs, 2016, Chapter 5, New Systems, pp. 121-57.
- Robert Travers, *Empire of Complaints: Mughal Law and the Making of British India, 1765-1793*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, Introduction, pp. 1-30; Chapters land 2, pp. 31-112.
- Sushil Chaudhury, 'Identity and Composite Culture: The Bengal Case,' in *Trade, Politics and Society: The Indian Milieu in the Early Modern Era*, New Delhi, Manohar, 2017, pp. 273-301.

Note: Examination scheme and mode shall be as prescribed by the Examination Branch, from time to time.