POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE: INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH AND BEYOND

by

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DURATION OF COURSE:
4 and half hours x 4 days (Monday through Thursday) = 18 hours + 2 hours (Friday) = 20 hours

TIMING OF COURSE: Mornings 11.00 am-1.30 pm; Evenings 4.00-6.00 pm

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF COURSE:

"The task of a writer is to provoke the imagination" SALMAN RUSHDIE

On this course, you are invited to explore the many enigmas and excitements that contemporary Indian English fiction has to offer. The aim is to open a trapdoor to the several varieties of social and literary provocation at work in these writings.

The Indian novel in English has changed dramatically - in its styles, its themes and its ideologies - in the thirty-five years or so following the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism in 1979 and Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children in 1981. On this course, we will read the work of the new generation of Indian writers popularly known as 'Rushdie's children' as well as some of Rushdie's own writing.

Our aim will be:

a) to understand the idea of 'postcolonial literature' and the conceptual and critical space occupied by the 'otherness' of the postcolonial imagination;

b) to appreciate the sheer linguistic vitality of this sort of postcolonial fiction;
c) to analyse the way in which the Indian subcontinent, or indeed any other previously colonized space, has been imaginatively reworked in recent Indian Anglophone writing, including in postcolonial criticism and theory; and

d) to consider the cross-cultural impact and predict the future of such major reinventions of the 'selfhood' as postcolonial literatures seem to encompass.

DATES

5 October, Monday: TIME LINES, TERRITORIES, TRAVEL

The main question posed, to begin with, is 'What is Post-colonialism?' This first set of two lectures will bring together some of the historical and geographical issues raised in postcolonial literatures in general and Indian English writings (IWE) in particular. We will discuss the various 'events' that contributed to the making of contemporary Indian English fiction, from the colonial era onwards to the seminal publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981 and after. Matters of location and language, especially the mental spaces occupied and created in post-colonial fiction, will be examined.

6 October, Tuesday: TEXTS

The central question we address next is 'What constitutes a postcolonial text?' In these lectures, we will attempt close readings of selected passages from novel and/or short stories written by Indian English writers (e.g. Arundhati Roy, Amitabh Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Chetan Bhagat, Allan Sealy), concentrating on the stylistic and linguistic features of these texts, their local contexts and global circulation, and focusing on the ways in which images of 'self' and 'other' are formed in IWE.

7 October, Wednesday: THEMES

In this set of lectures, we move on to inquire 'Are there themes that are prototypically postcolonial' in Indian English Fiction? Furthermore, are themes in IWE particularly Indian?' If so, what indeed constitutes 'Indian-ness' or 'European-ness' or 'Brazilian-ness' in postcolonial and postmodernist fictions? How is post-colonialism different from postmodernism? How are broad 'real-world' topics such as ethnicity, identity, gender, politics, class, caste, race etc. explored within IWE?

8 Thursday: THEORY

Here, we ask 'Why is theory so important in any engagement with genres such IWE today? Postcolonial theories are brought to bear upon the reading of postcolonial fictions in these lectures. Key ideas and terms (e.g. subalternism, auto-ethnography, diaspora, hybridity, indifference) as well as thinkers (e.g. Hall, Bhabha, Spivak, Appiah, Gates) in postcolonial theory are discussed in order to try and assess the uniqueness and appeal of postcolonial literatures even in the 21st century.
The final, discursive query we raise on the course is 'What is future of postcolonial literature and theory today? Is the trajectory traced by Rushdie's work from *Midnight's Children* in 1981 to *Shalimar the Clown* in 2005 over or is there more to come? These final lectures discuss the forms and substance of post-colonialism in so-called 'post-identity' cultures such as the virtual world of the Internet as well as in the 'post-Bollywood' era, analyzing the paths that the young genre of Indian English fiction may take in future - its hidden fears and limitations as well as its still unplumbed imaginative and literary potential.

**Brief Reading List:**

