FROM TAJ TO RAJ: EARLY MODERN INDIA, C. 1500-1800

Day/Time: MW 2:00-3:20
Office Address: Harris Hall Room 307
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Maximum Enrollment: 45

COURSE DESCRIPTION: When people think of early modern India it is typically the fabled courts of the Mughal Empire, or monuments such as the Taj Mahal, or perhaps romantic portrayals of adventure and derring-do under the British Raj that capture their imagination. But beyond all the glitz and romance, the period from about 1500-1800 was also one of significant transformations in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of the Indian subcontinent. This course will survey some of these developments, beginning with the integration of India’s multiple religious, literary, and visual cultures under the Mughal Empire’s ideology of “universal civility” (sulh-i kull). This policy included the welcoming of European merchants and missionaries who began arriving in the Indian subcontinent during the 16th century; but as Mughal power waned in the 18th century, it faced challenges not only from former client states and regional kingdoms that sought to fill its shoes, but also from the encounter with Europe, particularly the growing military and economic might of the British. And as the British role in India transitioned from one of mere traders to that of empire-builders with a so-called “civilizing mission,” they too would transform the culture and society of India in ways that continue to resonate in South Asian history and cultural memory today.

AREA OF CONCENTRATION: Asia/Middle East, Global

TEACHING METHOD: Lecture and discussion sections

EVALUATION METHOD: Papers of varying length, periodic quizzes, participation

GRADING BASIS: Student option (P/N allowed)

TENTATIVE READING LIST:
Catherine Asher & Cynthia Talbot, India before Europe (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9780521005395.
All other readings on Canvas

INSTRUCTOR PROFILE: Rajeev Kinra specializes in South Asian cultural and intellectual history, especially that of the Mughal Empire and the early modern Indo-Persian world, ca. 16th-19th centuries, as well as the early phase of European -- particularly British -- colonial expansion in the Indian Ocean world. In addition to teaching courses on South, Central, and West Asian cultural and political history, he also teaches Part One of the History Department’s Global History sequence, and a popular seminar on the historical context(s) of the Indiana Jones movie series. He is currently the Director of the Asian Studies Program, and the co-director of Northwestern’s Global Humanities Initiative.