

## Language, Identity, and Nation in South Asia: Discussion Questions

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How is the concept of race, as seen in the US, similar or different than caste?

How have the historical processes that shape identity categories such as race and class in the US been different from or similar to those in South Asia?

Do different languages hold different prestige levels in your society? How will people react if you are speaking a different language other than the lingua franca around them?

Cows are considered holy animals in Hinduism. At various points in time cow protection acts were introduced in India, making it illegal to slaughter cows. Today this remains one of the biggest points of clash between Hindus and Muslims in India, and recently many Muslims in India have been victims of violence in “cow lynchings” if they face accusations of slaughtering cows or even simply consuming beef. Can you think of any other similar challenge where the same thing was viewed very differently by the conflicting parties? What solution did they find?

On the surface the violence of Partition seemed to be straightforwardly based on religious difference. Many scholars, however, have argued that there were other rivalries (economic and political) that were actually the driving causes. Although the US hasn't seen large scale communal riots as have been seen from time to time in South Asia, there have been many instances of violence that seem to be based on various identity factors. How can we think beyond the surface explanations for various kinds of violence and look more carefully at a variety of root causes?

While the United States doesn't have an official language, what political bodies or identity categories are tied to language in the US? Can you think of moments in the US where language has been explicitly tied to political and social movements?

Who has or should have the power to make decisions about “official” languages?

To what degree is linguistic tolerance desirable or necessary? Particularly as educators, to what extent do we have an obligation to encourage our students to use language in normative ways?

What responsibilities do governments, educators, and citizens have in regard to linguistic diversity?

After Partition, the governments of both newly formed countries declared English as one of their official languages. In India, Hindi was given the same status as English and it faced resistance especially in the south, where the first organized protest happened in 1937 and the most recent in 2014. In Pakistan Urdu met a similar challenge. Why do you think both countries picked English as their official language and still continue to do so? Is this a positive or a negative thing?