Introduction to the Literatures of South Asia
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M/Th 8:40-10:00am, Beck 201

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Office hours: Wednesdays 3:30-4:30pm, Thursdays 2:15-3:15pm, or by appointment

Course description

This course introduces students to the literature of the Indian subcontinent, which is situated within the broader region of South Asia (Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). It surveys a selection of translated texts in various Indian languages from the classical to the postcolonial periods and explores a range of genres such as the epic, drama, poetry, essay writing, the short story, the novel, and film. In particular, we will examine how key cultural concepts have reappeared across Indian literary traditions over time, reimagined within the context of specific historical junctures and socio-linguistic networks. We will thus give attention to themes such as the conflict between tradition and modernity, man-woman relationships, communalism and caste conflict, colonialism and nationalism, problems of translation, and the intersections between ideas of religiosity and ideas of the literary.

Course objectives

By the end of this course, students will develop a theoretical understanding of several major literary-historical movements in South Asia, especially India, and gain a sense of the richness and diversity of Indian literary traditions more generally. Furthermore, they will be able to draw connections across these traditions through close reading and critical analysis, demonstrating both the continuities between, as well as the historical and cultural specificities of, literary tropes and concepts.

Core Curriculum Learning Goals Met by this Course

This course fulfills the SAS Core Curriculum Arts and the Humanities (AH) learning goals o and p. As regards goal o, upon completion of this course students will be able to critically evaluate philosophical and theoretical issues concerning South Asian experiences of truth, duty, morality, love, and devotion as seen through sacred texts, epic and lyric poetry, essay writing, drama, the novel, and the short story. As regards goal p, students will be able to analyze the production and continuation of several canonical South Asian literary traditions (including The Mahabharata, The Ramayana, Kalidasa’s Sanksrit drama, the ghazal form, and bhakti poetry) in relation to their specific historical, cultural, and socio-linguistic contexts.

Required Texts

Course readings uploaded to the Sakai course website at https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal


**Course Requirements**

**Attendance:**
Because this is a reading-intensive and discussion-based course, attendance and participation are compulsory and will be an important component of your final grade. Each student is allowed two unexcused absences for the semester, after which your attendance grade will be lowered by a letter for each additional unexcused absence. This means that your attendance grade will drop to a B if you miss three classes and to a C if you miss four classes, and so forth.

If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/ to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email will automatically be sent to me.

Excused absences include religious holidays (please notify me in advance), family emergencies, transportation emergencies, health emergencies, and scheduled visits to the doctor (in which case, students should bring a note from their doctor). Students who find themselves needing to be excused for a long period of time for medical or other reasons should contact their college dean and ask the dean to notify all their professors of their absence.

**Participation:**
As class participation is a requirement of this course, students must come ready to discuss the texts chosen for that day. **Not having read the assigned texts for class is equivalent to an absence.** Please make sure to have ordered and received all the relevant texts in time for the start class. **You are not allowed to have an online copy of the text—you will need to have it in print form of some kind.** Tardiness, inattention, and not participating actively detracts from the learning experience of others and will not be tolerated.

Participation is assessed through your in-class questions and comments, completion of in-class quizzes and exercises, small group work, and office hour visits.

**Reading Responses:**
As part of this course, you will be responsible for writing and submitting five one-page (or longer), single-spaced reading responses over the semester on the due dates indicated in the reading schedule. The purpose of these responses is to help you engage critically with the readings and to formulate written queries, hypotheses, and arguments pertaining to them that will inform both class discussions, as well as your paper writing process. I therefore expect these responses to be well
composed and thoughtfully argued. Each response must discuss one or more of the readings for the upcoming class and will handed in at the beginning of class. **No late responses will be accepted.**

**Oral Presentation:**
Each student will partner with a classmate to give one 15 minute oral presentation over the course of the semester. The presentation should engage with all the readings assigned on that day, discussing their main arguments, and raise one or two guiding questions for class discussion. I strongly encourage you to come talk to me during office hours before your presentation day.

**Midterm:**
There will be one take home midterm exam organized around several short-answer essay questions. Late exams will lose one letter grade for each week they are submitted after the deadline.

**Final Paper:**
There will be one final paper of 5-7 pages. In advance of this paper, you will hand in an outline of your argument and supporting claims, as well as an annotated bibliography that includes at least two secondary sources. Late papers will lose one letter grade for each week they are submitted after the deadline.

**Grading**

- Attendance/Participation: 20%
- Reading Responses: 25%
- Oral Presentation: 5%
- Midterm: 20%
- Final Paper (5-7 pgs): 30% (including Outline and Annotated Bibliography)

**Extra Credit**
You may receive extra credit (up to 2% of your final grade) by attending literature oriented extra-curricular events scheduled throughout the term. To obtain extra credit, you must 1) receive approval from me for the event in advance of the event, 2) write a one-page summary of the event, and 3) prepare a list of 4-5 critical questions prompted by the event that relate to this course. You may exercise this option only once per term.

**Plagiarism**

Rutgers University views plagiarism as a very serious offense. Plagiarism is the use of another person’s words, ideas, or results without giving that person appropriate credit. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or appropriate indentation and both direct quotation and paraphrasing must be cited properly. Some common examples of plagiarism include copying something word for word (from an oral, printed, or electronic source) without proper attribution, paraphrasing without proper attribution, or submitting a purchased, downloaded, or one’s own already-submitted paper. Cases of plagiarism will be pursued following university regulations, which can be found at http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml.

Wikipedia and other non-peer reviewed websites are not acceptable sources for papers and reading responses.
Use of Electronic Devices

Computers, cell phones, and all other technological devices (beepers, iPods, MP3 players, etc.) must be turned off during class out of respect for the instructor and fellow students.

Disability Support Services

Students who may be requesting accommodations due to disabilities are encouraged to familiarize themselves with procedures and policies regarding disability support services at the following website: http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/. It is recommended that students seeking accommodations begin filing paperwork as soon as possible as the documentation review process may take up to 30 business days. Students are encouraged to speak with teachers about these issues at the beginning of the term. All such conversations will be kept strictly confidential.

Reading Schedule

Please note that the following reading schedule may change according to the pace and interests of the class.

Thu 9/6
Introduction to the course

“That Art Thou”—Theories of Truth and Oneness

Mon 9/10

Thu 9/13

Mon 9/17
Reading Response 1 discussing Samskara due at the beginning of today’s class.


Thu 9/20

Mon 9/24


Dharma—Theories of Duty and Morality

Thu 9/27

Mon 10/1
In lieu of today’s class, you are requested to attend Sheldon Pollock’s inaugural lecture of the AMESALL Distinguished Lecture Series, titled “Postcapitalist Reading,” at 4:30pm in the Alexander Library Teleconference Room, 4th floor (CAC). Please see the attached flyer for more details.

Professor Pollock is Arvind Raghunathan Professor of South Studies in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University. His areas of specialization are Sanskrit philology, Indian intellectual and literary history, and increasingly, comparative intellectual history.

Those students who cannot attend today’s lecture due to scheduling conflicts, please talk to me in advance about making up this class.

Thu 10/4
Reading Response 2 discussing Sheldon Pollock’s lecture due at the beginning of today’s class.


Mon 10/8

Thu 10/11

Ancient and Modern Husbands and Wives

Mon 10/15

**Thu 10/17**

**Mon 10/22**

**Thu 10/25**

**Mon 10/29**
*Reading Response 3 on Kalidasa’s Sakuntala due at the beginning of today’s class.*


**Thu 11/1**


**Mon 11/5**
*Take home midterm exam due at the beginning of today’s class.*

*Today’s class will meet in the Kilmer Library Conference Room for a screening of Sita Sings the Blues (2008, 82 min), English, directed by Nina Paley.*
Old and New Worlds—Theories of Love and Loss

Thu 11/8

Mon 11/12
*Today’s class will be a library resources workshop in the Kilmer Library Instructional Alcove with Triveni Kuchi, South Asia Librarian and Director of the South Asian Studies Program at Rutgers.*

Thu 11/15


Mon 11/19
*Reading Response 4 on Rakesh’s One Day in the Season of Rain and/or Faiz’s The Rebel’s Silhouette due at the beginning of today’s class.*


Thu 11/22
*No class due to Thanksgiving Break.*

Mon 11/26
*Reading Response 5 on Ghazals of Ghalib due at the beginning of today’s class.*

*Today’s class will meet in the Kilmer Library Conference Room for a screening of Shatranj ke Khilari [The Chess Players] (1977, 129 min), Urdu with English subtitles, directed by Satyajit Ray.*

Bhakti—Theories of Devotion and Boundary Crossing

Thu 11/29


Mon 12/3
*Paper outline and annotated bibliography due at the beginning of today’s class.*


Thu 12/6


Mon 12/10
*Review of course.*

Fri 12/14
*Final paper due in my office by noon.*
Postcapitalist Reading
An exciting exploration of possibilities beyond the postcolonial by
Professor Sheldon Pollock
(Arvind Raghunathan Professor of South Asian Studies, Columbia University)

Monday, October 1, 2012
4:30-6:00pm
Alexander Library, CAC
Teleconference Room, 4th Floor
(Reception at 4:00pm – All are welcome)

For the past thirty years the study of Asia has been powerfully, and properly, shaped by postcolonialism, that is, by the aim of rebalancing the authority to represent. However, a tide of recent developments, economical, political, and ecological, with global or near-global transformative effect, prompts the question whether we should now find ways to supplement postcolonialism with postcapitalism as the organizing logic of critical inquiry. This presentation will seek to contribute toward this sort of liberation philology, so to call it: trying to understand how we humanists might move from preoccupation with past wrongs toward envisioning, and in our own way enacting, future rights.

Co-sponsored by the Dean of Humanities, the Program in South Asian Studies, and the Office of Undergraduate Education

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For more information contact
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