

**Imagining New Futures: Science Fiction and the Fantastic in
South Asian Literature
Nudrat Kamal
Spring 2025**

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:45-3:15 PM

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Office Hours: By appointment

Description:

This course will investigate the many threads of fantastic literature and science-fiction present in South Asian literature, along with the ways in which the unreal is understood across time. Folk literature and epic, romance and puzzle, detective novel and speculative fiction—the unreal and the speculative enters into literature in unexpected ways, cutting across commonly held divisions between the modern and the classical, the popular and the refined. As part of this course, we will also examine the ways in which the unknown is theorized and understood, and how the unreal is juxtaposed to the real. Readings will span translations of modern and pre-modern literary languages of South Asia, including Sanskrit, Persian, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, and Urdu.

Attendance and conduct

Attendance: Regular attendance is crucial both for fostering an engaged, dynamic class environment, as well as keeping up with the readings and assignments. Please let me know as soon as possible if you need to miss class for any reason. Excessive absences outside the course selection period can affect your final grade.

Academic Integrity: It is your responsibility to be familiar with the University's Code of Academic Integrity. Instances of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for adjudication.

Accommodations: University of Pennsylvania provides reasonable accommodations to

students with disabilities who have self-identified and been approved by the office of Student Disabilities Services (SDS). Please make an appointment to meet with me as soon as possible in order to discuss your accommodations and your needs. If you have not yet contacted SDS, and would like to request accommodations or have questions, you can make an appointment by calling SDS 215.573.9235. The office is located in the Weingarten Learning Resources Center at Stouffer Commons 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300. All services are confidential.

Assessment Criteria:

Grades will be based on the following criteria:

1. Annotations on Weekly Responses on Texts (25%): For each text of the week, students will be expected to write a short response paper. All weekly responses should be posted to Canvas by 9pm on Sunday.

2. Active Participation in Classes (20%): Your contributions in class should demonstrate that you are keeping up with the readings and engaged in thinking through and articulating your responses to the course material.

3. Two Critical Analysis Papers (40%): Two critical analysis papers, with a clearly articulated argument and sufficient evidence from the chosen text(s):

a) Paper 1: Essay of 5-6 pages on chosen work (15%) [Due in Week 9]

b) Paper 2: Essay of 6-7 pages on chosen work (20%) [Due in Week 15]

3. Presentation (15%): On one of the weekly readings and texts, with an articulated argument and two discussion questions about the texts .

Note: The following is intended to help guide our readings over the semester. However, if necessary, I will alter the order of readings, add or subtract readings, or make other changes to the course.

Note: *all readings will be available on canvas*

Weekly Class Plan

Week 1 (Jan 13-19)	Introduction: Defining South Asian SFF Monday: No Class Wednesday: Introductions	
Week 2 (Jan 20-26)	Premodern Literature as Proto-Science Fiction Monday: - Selections from <i>Dasakumaracarita</i> [What Ten Young Men Did] (1889) Wednesday: Selections <i>Kathasaritsagara</i> [Ocean of Stories] (1884)	

<p>Week 3</p> <p>(Jan 27-Feb 2)</p>	<p>The Sufi Romance and the Dastan</p> <p>Monday:</p> <p>Selections from from <i>Mirigavati</i> [The Magic Doe] <i>Dastan-e-Amir Hamza</i> [The Adventures of Amir Hamza] (1883)</p> <p>Wednesday:</p> <p>Selections from <i>Dastan-e-Amir Hamza</i> [The Adventures of Amir Hamza] (1883)</p>	
<p>Week 4</p> <p>(Feb 3-9)</p>	<p>Science Fiction in the Dastan and Early Novel</p> <p>Monday: Selections from <i>Tilism-e-Hoshruba</i> [The Enchantment of the Senses] (1883)</p> <p>Wednesday: Selections from <i>Chandrakanta</i>, Devakinandan Khatri (1888)</p>	

<p>Week 5 (Feb 10-16)</p>	<p>Early Utopias: Feminism, Anticolonialism, Anticapitalism</p> <p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The Republic of Orissá; a Page from the Annals of the Twentieth Century,” Shoshee Chunder Dutt (1845) - “Sultana’s Dream,” Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1905) <p>Wednesday: Selections from <i>Baisvin Sadi</i> [The Twenty-Second Century] Rahul Sankrityayan (1924)</p>	
<p>Week 6 (Feb 17-23)</p>	<p>The Fantastic versus the Real in the Early Novel</p> <p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Munshi Premchand, “The Aims of Literature” - Premchand, “The Travels of the Dervish” (1910) <p>Wednesday: Premchand “The Most Precious Jewel in the World” (1907)</p>	<p>Paper 1 Due Feb 23</p>

Week 7 (Feb 24-Mar 2)	Horror, Sci-fi and Fantasy in the Vernacular Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Oh, Fanged Night!” Hijab Imtiaz Ali (1935) - “Mosquito,” Premendra Mitra (1945) Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Inspector Matadeen on the Moon,” Harishankar Parsai (1960) - “Metamorphosis,” Intizar Hussain (1962) 	
Week 8 (Mar 3-9)	Science Fiction and the Confrontation of Colonial Science Monday: <i>The Calcutta Chromosome</i> , Amitav Ghosh (1996) (first half) Wednesday: <i>The Calcutta Chromosome</i> , Amitav Ghosh (1996) (second half)	
Week 9 (Mar 10-16)	Spring Break No Classes!	

<p>Week 10 (Mar 17-23)</p>	<p>Contemporary Anglophone SFF: Djinn, Robots, and Androids</p> <p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Reap,” Sami Shah - “Flexi-Time,” Manjula Padmanabhan <p>Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The Pauper Prince and the Eucalyptus Jinn,” Usman T. Malik 	<p>Paper 2 Due Apr 3</p>
<p>Week 11 (Mar 24-30)</p>	<p>Gender and Sexuality in South Asian SFF</p> <p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “A Handful of Rice,” Vandana Singh - “The Petticoat Government,” Kehkashan Khalid <p>Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “His Footsteps, Through Darkness and Light,” Mimi Mondal - “To Love So Freely,” Aqdas Aftab 	

<p>Week 12 (Mar 31-Apr 6)</p>	<p>South Asian SFF and Climate Change</p> <p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Indra’s Web,” Vandana Singh (2019) - “Reunion,” Vandana Singh (2020) <p>Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Bring Your Own Spoon,” Saad Hossain (2017) - “Arisudan,” Rimi B. Chatterjee (2021) 	
<p>Week 13 (Apr 7-13)</p>	<p>South Asian SFF and Climate Change (Continued)</p> <p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Dreaming of the Cool Green River,” Priya Sarrukai Chabria - “The Songs That Humanity Lost Reluctantly To Dolphins,” Sweta Taneja <p>Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The Smokecense of Pluvistan,” Nihal Ijaz Khan 	
<p>Week 14 (Apr 14-20)</p>	<p>Twenty-first Century Dystopias and Utopias</p> <p>Monday: <i>The City Inside</i>, Samit Basu</p>	

	Wednesday: “Swipe” (2020)	
Week 15 (Apr 21-27)	Twenty-first Century Dystopias and Utopias (Continued) Monday: <i>Gurkha and the Lord of Tuesday</i> , Saad Hossain Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Children Always Come Home,” Saher Hasnain - “The City of Mitr,” Sadia Khatri 	
Week 16 (Apr 28-30)	The Future of South Asian SFF Monday: “Mother Ocean,” Vandana Singh Wednesday: Final paper workshop + Conclusions	Final Paper Due April 30