

South Asian Studies

SAST 054.401/SAST554.401 Religion and Resistance in South Asia

Fall 2022

(fulfills Humanities and Social Science Requirement)

Class Meets Mon and Wed: 1:45 pm to 3:15pm



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Course Description:

In this course, we focus on various medieval and contemporary devotional forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam in South Asia. Several definitions tie the idea of devotion to classicism and traditionalism with a set of conservative concepts and textual patterns. Contesting similar stereotypical boundaries, this course introduces the students to a diverse and pluralistic understanding of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam that also has a history of resistance and protest beginning with poets such as Kabir and others from the Bhakti movement, and Sufi devotional contexts in South Asia. We read about the histories of these rebellious poets and their interventions into the traditional practices of devotion. We learn about how historical

methodology provides theoretical frameworks to study these concepts by connecting to everyday religious life.

The assignments in this course are designed to focus on integrating theory and practice. In this course, we also have a combination of primary and secondary sources. Students are encouraged to consult the secondary sources to comprehend the contours of the primary sources. Students are also introduced to various ethnographic practices related to South Asian religions and we will have two guest lectures by the experts who share their fieldwork experiences.

All the reading materials will be available on the canvas.

Primary Sources:

1. Dharwadker, Vinay. *Kabir: The Weaver's Songs*, Penguin Classics, 2005.
2. Hawley and Jurgensmeyer. *Songs of the Saints of India*, Oxford, 2008.
3. Ravikant and Saint. *Translating Partition*, Katha, 2001
4. Mohammad, Afsar. *The Festival of Pirs: Shared Devotion and Popular Islam in South India*, Oxford University Press, 2013.
5. Malala Yousufzai and Patricia McCormick, *I am Malala: How One Girl Stood up for Education and Changed the World*, Little Brown Books, 2016
6. Flueckiger, Joyce. *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*, Indiana University Press, 2006.
7. Hallisey, Charles (ed and tr.) *Terigatha: Selected Poems of the First Buddhist Women*, Harvard University Press, 2015.

Secondary Sources:

1. Linda Hess, *Bodies of Song: Kabir Oral Traditions and Performative Worlds in North India*, Oxford University Press, 2015.
2. Gilmartin and Lawrence, *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, University Press of Florida, 2000.
3. Tarun K. Saint. *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History and Fiction*, New York: Routledge, 2019.
4. Diane Mines. *Caste in India*, Association for Asian Studies, 2009.
5. Corrinne Dempsey and Pintchman. *Sacred Matters: Material Religion in South Asian Religions*, SUNY Press, 2016.
6. Sonja Thomas, *Privileged Minorities: Syrian Christianity, Gender, Minority Rights in Postcolonial India*, University of Washington Press, 2018.
7. Brian Black and Laurie Patton (eds), *Dialogue in Early South Asian Religions: Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Traditions*, Ashgate, 2015.

Class Attendance and Participation:

Regrettably, excessive unexcused absences and persistent failure to prepare the assignments on time have deleterious effects on final grades for the class. On the other hand, vigorous and

informed participation in class discussions can help a grade. Other factors, such as student's progress or effort in the course, may also affect final grades for the class.

Assignments:

Note: Since this course focuses on integrating theory and practices, I encourage you to reflect on the dynamics of these two aspects in every assignment, either oral or written.

1. Reading responses due one day before every class. (150 Words): 15%
2. Class Presentation: 20 minutes (plus 5 minutes Q & A): 20

Since we follow academic conference presentation style, I will provide guidelines before every presentation in an individual conference.

3. Mid-term paper (1500 Words):25%

Students are expected to use a concept and apply it to two or more readings with a comparative religious studies approach

4. Ethnographic writing : 15%

Students are allowed to visit a religious site or the South Asian section of the Penn Museum to write an ethnographic essay using the concepts and methods introduced in the course.

5. Final paper (2000 Words): 25%

Students need to submit an outline of the final paper one week before the last class day.

Additional Instructions:

1. Students are required to post reading reflections on the for every reading. Each response is one paragraph with 150 to 200 words typically ending with a question related to the reading.
2. Students should be prepared to work in groups in and outside the class. Peer-review of the mid-term papers is just one form of this group work.
3. Students should submit well-edited and proof-read writing assignments. Failure to meet the basic writing requirements is an automatic low grade. Please do not submit rough drafts or drafts in the progress.
4. I will be very particular about the class presentations and you should submit the outline of your presentation one week before the class presentation. Be prepared to a formal question and answer session following every presentation.

Tentative Calendar

Week 1 Introductions

Introducing major themes, concepts and research methodology:

a) Concepts of Religion and Resistance, b) History of Religions of South Asia, and c) Historical research methodology in South Asian religions

Week 2: Religion as a source of resistance: Poetry

Kabir's Legacy of Devotional Poetry and Resistance

Primary Source: Selected poems from Vinay Dharwadker's *Kabir: The Weaver's Songs*

Secondary Source: Linda Hess, *Bodies of Song: Kabir Oral Traditions and Performative Worlds in North India*, Oxford University Press, 2015.

Week 3: Contemporary Religions: Fiction and Film

1. Movie *A Billion Color Story*

Secondary Source: Gilmartin and Lawrence, *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, University Press of Florida, 2000.

2. *Manto*, Toba Tek Singh

Secondary Source: Tarun K. Saint. *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History and Fiction*, New York: Routledge, 2019.

Week 4: Dealing with Contemporary Issues: Historical Research and Methodology

1. Readings: 1. Gottschalk and Schmalz, *Engaging South Asian Religions*, pp. 1-17
2. Laine, James. *Resisting My Attackers; Resisting My Defenders*

Week 5: Paradigms and Practical Concerns

1. Bashir, Shahzad. *Resisting Assimilation*.
2. Courtright, Paul. *Climbing Through Paradigms*
3. Dube, Saurabh. *Scandals, Scholars, Subjects*.

Week 6th: Debating Religious Boundaries

Mohammad, Afsar. *The Festival of Pirs: Shared Devotion and Popular Islam in South India*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

Week 7th: Hinduism: Caste Politics and Protest

Bama, *Sangati (Events)*, Oxford India Collections, 2009.

Secondary Sources: Diane Mines. *Caste in India*, Association for Asian Studies, 2009.

Week 8: Hinduism: Fierce Gods

Mines, Diane. *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village*, Indiana University Press, 2005.

Conversation with Prof. Diane Mines, “Caste Narratives and Contemporary Research Methodologies”

Week 9: Islam and Popular Manifestations

Yousufzai, Malala and Patricia McCormick, *I am Malala: How One Girl Stood up for Education and Changed the World*, Little Brown Books, 2016

Week 10: Islam and Gender Politics

Flueckiger, Joyce. *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*, Indiana University Press, 2006.

Week 11: Material Culture and South Asian Religions

Selections from

Corrinne Dempsey and Pintchman. *Sacred Matters: Material Religion in South Asian Religions*, SUNY Press, 2016.

visit to Penn Museum

Week 12: Buddhism

Terigatha: Buddhist Women Poetry

Secondary Source:

Brian Black and Laurie Patton (eds), *Dialogue in Early South Asian Religions: Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Traditions*, Ashgate, 2015.

Week 13: Christianity and Contemporary Practices

Selections from Sonja Thomas, *Privileged Minorities: Syrian Christianity, Gender, Minority Rights in Postcolonial India*, University of Washington Press, 2018.

Guest Lecture: About Field Research of the Christian community in India

Week 14th and 15th : Student Presentations

Last Class day: Reviews and Reflections