

introduction to modern south asian literature

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office hours: TBD

Description

This course will provide a wide-ranging introduction to the literatures of South Asia from roughly 1500 to the present, as well as an exploration of their histories and impact on South Asian society today. How are literary movements and individual works—along with the attitudes towards religion, society, and culture associated with them—still influential in literature, film, and popular culture? How have writers across time and language engaged with questions of caste, gender, and identity? We will read from the rich archive of South Asian writing in translation—from languages that include Braj, Urdu, Bangla, and Tamil—to consider how these literatures achieve meaning in their own culture and moment while continuing to resonate across time and space. Topics of discussion will include the Bhakti poetics of personal devotion, the literature of Dalits—formerly referred to as Untouchables—and the ways in which literature addresses contemporary political and social problems. Students will leave this course with a sense of the contours of the literatures of South Asia as well as ways of exploring the role of these literatures in the larger world. No prior knowledge of South Asia is required; this course fulfills the cross-cultural analysis requirement.

Required Reading

Class Readings: Readings will average 50-70 pages per week.

Availability of Reading: Readings will be posted to canvas.

Grading Breakdown

Grading Scale:

80-83: B-

84-87: B

88-89: B+

90-93: A-

94+: A

note: A grade of A+ is only granted at the instructor's discretion, in case of superlative contribution to the class.

Attendance and Participation: 20%

Canvas Response: 20%

Writing Assignment One (2-3 pages): 10% of final grade

Writing Assignment Two (4-5 pages): 10% of final grade

Writing Assignment Three (4-5 pages): 20% of final grade

Final Writing Assignment (5-7 pages): 20% of final grade

Visibility of Grading: All grades will be posted to Canvas.

Assignments

Canvas Response: Each week, by the Sunday evening before Monday's class, there will be a canvas assignment asking you to post the following: 1) a brief *question*, related to the text, which you hope will be answered in class; 2) a *quote* which you think was particularly meaningful, or relevant to discussion; and 3) a *problem*: something you felt was unresolved after your reading, or a lingering sensation in your mind. This is intended simply to be a brief response to help generate discussion during the week. The steps of this will be modelled in the first class! *Please note:* because the purpose of these responses is to prepare you for class discussion, these assignments can not be made up after the due date.

Attendance: Regular attendance is an essential part of the course. However, attendance will be graded through the grading of short assignments in class, not by taking regular attendance. This means, on the one hand, that if there is no participation assignment on a given day, then there will be no penalty for not attending class. On the other hand, participation assignments cannot be made up afterwards.

Bonus Assignments: There will be four bonus assignments given in the course, which will each count for one participation assignment. Bonus assignments can only be used to substitute for missing participation scores, and cannot raise the total score for the course above 95%.

Participation Point: In the event of distinguished participation throughout the class (to be determined by instructor / TAs), one extra participation point can be assigned. Conversely, in the event of distinguished *non*-participation, i.e. through excessive lateness to class, or excessive technology use, a participation point can be subtracted.

Writing Assignments and Final Revision Assignment: Writing assignments will be designed to focus on different aspects of the course, and will include both analytical as well as creative elements. The final essay assignment for the course will be a revision of one of the earlier essays.

Conduct

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.

Use of Technology in Class: Please do not use any personal technology (laptop, phone, etc.) in class. There may be specific instances in which I ask you to use your computer or phone to take part in an activity, but that will be announced in class. Technology can easily be distracting—I also struggle with this!—and as the pressure of the semester increases, this will only become more difficult. When we engage more deeply with a given selection of a text, I will distribute the selection through handouts. Use of technology outside of class purposes will be assessed in participation scores, and may result in the loss of a further participation point.

Absence for Schoolwork and other exceptions: Given the realities of Penn undergraduate life, there will be times when you either need to miss class, either due to minor illness or other obligations, or you need an extension for one of the essay assignments. Under normal circumstances, the bonus point system is designed allow for you to miss up to four classes over the semester with minor penalties. However, if you are going to need to miss more than that for any reason, please contact the instructor or TA to discuss your situation.

Plagiarism Policy: <http://www.college.upenn.edu/policies/integrity.php> and http://www.gethelp.library.upenn.edu/PORT/documentation/plagiarism_policy.html

Schedule

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. Changes to the syllabus will be reflected in a revised syllabus to be uploaded to canvas.

Week One: Introduction, Beginning *Intro piece* over weekend

Week Two: *Setting the Scene*

- Metcalf and Metcalf: *A Concise History of Modern India*, 1-28;
- Vinay Dharwadker, *The Weavers Songs*, "Introduction"
- Linda Hess, *The Bijak of Kabir*, "Introduction"

Week Three: Bhakti: Kabir

- Selections from Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, *Songs of Kabir* and other Kabir translations
- Kabir cont.

Week Four: Autobiography (Paper One due February 3)

- Tuesday: *Ardhakathānak* [Half a Tale], "Introduction"; "Half a Tale," 1-46
- Thursday: "Half a Tale," 47-96

Week Five: Amir Hamza

- selections from *The Tale of Amir Hamza*
- Amir Hamza ctd.

Week Six: The Ghazal, Delhi 1857

- Poetry of Ghalib
- Letters of Ghalib

Week Seven: Colonialism and Literature

- selection from Kaliprasanna Sinha, *The Observant Owl*
- *The Observant Owl*,

Week Eight: Writing by Women in the 19th Century (Paper Two Due March 4)

- selection from Rahsundari Devi, *My Life*
- Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "Sultana's Dream"

Week Nine: The Novel and Nationalism: *The Home and the World*

- Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, chs. 1-3 (pp. 1-76)
- HW, chs. 4-5. pp. 77-134

Week Ten: *The Home and the World*, cont.

- HW, chs. 6-9, pp. 135-215
- HW, chs. 10-12, pp. 216-280

Week Eleven: Responses to Partition and Independence

- Saadat Hasan Manto, "Toba Tek Singh"

- Ismat Chughtai, "Quit India"

Week Twelve: Rural India after Independence.

- Selections from *Legends of Khasak*
- *Legends of Khasak*, ctd.

Week Thirteen: Dalit Literature

- G. Nagaraj, "Self-Purification vs. Self-Respect"
- selection from Daya Pavar, *Baluta*

Week Fourteen: A Modern Pilgrimage (Paper Three due April 21)

- *Jejuri*
- *Jejuri*

Week Fifteen: Conclusions

- Excerpts from Vasudhendra, *Mohanaswamy*
- Final Class

Final, Revised Paper Due by last day of semester