Course Description

Nanak, the founder of the Sikh tradition, received a pivotal insight while immersed in a river. These were his words when he rose out of the water: “There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim.”

Charismatic teachers—Hindu and Sikh gurus and Muslim pirs—have long been prominent as interlocutors between religious communities in South Asia. This course will examine how this cross-pollination produced a mutual flowering in the early modern period. Hindu devotionalism and Islamic mysticism—Bhakti and Sufism—developed kindred concepts and attitudes, including a complementary mistrust of institutional authorities, a fondness for rhetorical paradox, and an emphasis on eroticism and mystical ecstasy.

The time: the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (mostly). The place: North India and neighboring regions—Punjab, Maharashtra, and Bengal. We will study the careers of historical holy men and women alongside critical readings of the words they themselves produced. And we will look at how the saints live on through cultic practice in the present day. One stress of our approach will be the relation between medium and message. How did their words spread across boundaries of community, caste, and geography? They traveled not only as teachings but as literature—in some cases as narrative and in others as poetry, powered by song.

The primary sources—in translations from several historical languages of northern India—are the heart of the syllabus. But again, we will be at pains to analyze how this discourse circulates along social networks among bodies in space. We will begin with a collection that introduces a number of key figures, Hawley and Juergensmeyer’s Songs of the Saints of India, and then work through the weeks that follow to develop a deeper

* Syllabus revised summer 2015; this course was offered in the spring under the title “God’s Fools.”
engagement with those saints and their messages. Class sessions will be conducted seminar-style, with selected readings being introduced by a student discussion leader. The assigned texts include four Indian films: three features and a documentary.

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

This class will encourage you to develop and express your ideas in more than one way. Alongside thesis-driven written assignments, the class discussion components invite students to communicate ideas dynamically and verbally. Some of our discussion will center on questions of cultural difference—on getting inside perspectives on collective and individual identity that may provoke you to examine your own (culturally constructed?) notions of society and self.

I find much of the South Asian material we will study together to be not only important, meaningful, and powerful but also beautiful and pleasurable. There is room in this course for the exploration not only of critical ideas but also aesthetic and creative perspectives.

Prerequisites: There are no formal course prerequisites for REL 40.05/AMES 42.09. But inasmuch as your ability to formulate mature and sophisticated ideas about the material you study with me will require you to relate it to various South Asia–specific contexts, I recommend that you enter this course forearmed with some prior experience of the academic study of the history, politics, or social organization of South Asia, or of South Asian cultures in their artistic, literary, or religious dimensions.

Required Texts

Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman, Madhumalati: An Indian Sufi Romance
John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, Songs of the Saints of India
Linda Hess and Shukdeo Singh, The Bijak of Kabir
Christopher Shackle and Arvind-pal Singh Mandair, Teachings of the Sikh Gurus

Textbooks can be purchased at the Wheelock and Dartmouth Bookstores. Make sure that you stick with the translations specified here. Note that the syllabus incorporates numerous reading assignments taken from sources outside of these books. You will be able to access these readings through Canvas.

Films

Chhalia (Dir. Manmohan Desai, 1960)
Dedh Ishqiyaa (dir. Abhishek Chaubey, 2014)
Had Anhad: Journeys with Ram and Kabir (dir. Shabnam Virmani, 2008)
In the Courtyard of the Beloved (dir. Sadia Shepard, 2011)
Meera (dir. Gulzar, 1979)
Course Requirements

1. Class Participation: 25% (comprising general participation, 15%; and Discussion Leader assignment, 10%)
2. Film essay, 5 pp.: 20%
3. History essay, 7+ pp.: 25%
4. Final paper, 8+ pp.: 30%

Classroom Policies

1. Attendance: Attendance in class is mandatory. If you find you are unable to attend on a particular day, tell me before you miss class, preferably through e-mail. Note that attendance is an important part of your class participation grade and my grading will take evaluations of your reasons for any absences into account.

2. Cell phones: Off. Checking your phone for messages, etc. while class is in session is a mark of disrespect to me, your classmates, and the College and—outside of an emergency context—will incur mockery from me or worse.

3. Food and drink: No eating in the classroom. Liquids are fine. If it were up to me you could smoke in class too, but if you took me up on that I suspect we could both get in hot water with the College.

If you require a personal exemption from any of these rules, talk to me or e-mail me about it.

4. A general principle concerning the syllabus: Read the whole syllabus. No, really. Like today.

5. Another general principle concerning the syllabus: The syllabus is subject to change through the course of the term. As your instructor, I may revise or augment what’s on the menu for any given day through the end of the term.

6. A general principle concerning class discussion: The classroom is a community, and class discussion is a collective project. When you contribute, be aware that your audience is a roomful of comparably well-informed interlocutors. Don’t be shy (I will try to encourage you), and keep in mind this basic point: It’s not about me; it’s about the ideas—and contributing to a dynamic and collective discussion about them.

7. Late assignment policy: I am open to giving extensions on papers, but work turned in late without my approval will incur a three-point penalty for every day it is late. The final paper is due at 5:00 on 9 June, which is the Dartmouth College deadline. As far as the other assignments (and emergencies) are concerned, there’s one cardinal rule: Don’t be a stranger. I promise to be accessible, by e-mail and in person before and after class and at the office.
8. **My attitude towards grading:** Do the reading for each class and make informed contributions to class discussion when you see an opening. If you follow these two baseline principles, you’ll be well on the way to succeeding in this course. A straight-A project for me is one that exhibits excellence, and generally speaking there are two ways to do that. The first is to produce work that is letter perfect. In the case of a paper, that means the argument is tight and it discusses the material at a level of sophistication that demonstrates mastery. The second way is to take an ‘intellectual risk—and for that risk to pay off. As a teacher, I’m never more pleased than when I recognize work from a student that surprises me and teaches me something new.

A grade in the C range or lower generally indicates that something is wrong. I don’t give out many Cs, and when I do I am sure to identify the problem. I do recognize that some students may make the call to turn in C-grade work in my class because they have placed their priorities elsewhere, and that is a decision I can respect on a personal level. In other words, no foul—so long as you’re 1) in control of the situation; and 2) not under the illusion that you’re entitled to a good grade for something you didn’t work hard on.

**Academic Honesty Policy**
*For academic honesty–related questions, refer to the Dartmouth Honor Code:*

**Student Needs**
Students with disabilities enrolled in this course and who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me before the end of the first week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Accessibility Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.
*Student Accessibility Services: [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/facstaff/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/facstaff/).*

**Additional Support for your Learning**
*Academic Skills Center: [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/~acskills/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/~acskills/).*
*Research Center for Writing and Information Technology (RWiT): [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/~rwit](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/~rwit).*
Course Schedule

week 1—Introductions

Mar. 30 (M)
introductions of: members of the class; the general scheme of the class; its goals and standards. How do we think about Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam in historical and present-day India? What sort of concept of religion do we need to develop if that term is going to have critical purchase in these contexts?

Apr. 1 (W)

2 (Thu)
screening (7:00, Rockefeller 003): Chhalia (dir. Manmohan Desai, 1960)

3 (F)
reading: Harjot Oberoi, from The Construction of Religious Boundaries, “Introduction”
film discussion: Chhalia
assign ungraded essay, “Hindu and Muslim as Collective Identities before Colonialism”

week 2—The Cast(e) of Characters

6 (M)
readings: Max Weber, “The Prophet,” “The Religious Congregation, Preaching, and Pastoral Care”
assign discussion leader dates

8 (W)
reading: Hawley and Juergensmeyer, Songs of the Saints of India, selections

10 (F)
reading: Hawley and Juergensmeyer, Songs of the Saints of India, selections
ungraded essay, “Hindu and Muslim as Collective Identities before Colonialism,” due in class

week 3—Saints/Sants

13 (M)
readings: Hawley and Juergensmeyer, Songs of the Saints of India, selective review;
Charlotte Vaudeville, “Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity”

_in-class screening:_ “Ik Onkar” (*Rang De Basanti*)

15 (W)
_readings:_ Cythia Talbot, “Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India”; Eleanor Zelliot, “A Medieval Encounter between Hindu and Muslim: Eknath’s Drama-Poem *Hindu-Turk Samvad*”

17 (F)
_reading:_ Christian Lee Novetzke, _from_ Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India

**week 4—Sounds, Spaces, and Bodies**

19 (Sun)
_screening (7:00, Rockefeller 003):* Dedh Ishqiya* (dir. Abhishek Chaubey, 2014)

20 (M)
_reading:_ Peter Manuel, “Music, the Media, and Communal Relations in India, Past and Present”

_film discussion:_ *Dedh Ishqiya*

22 (W)
_reading:_ Carla Bellamy, _from_ The Powerful Ephemeral, “Prologue,” “People: The Tale of the Four Virtuous Women”

_in-class screening:_ *In the Courtyard of the Beloved* (dir. Sadia Shepard, 2011)

24 (F)
_reading:_ Shahzad Bashir, _from_ Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam, “Befriending God Corporeally,” “Bonds of Love”

_in-class screening:_ “Khwaja Mere Khwaja” (*Jodhaa Akbar*)

**week 5—Sufism**

27 (M)
_reading:_ Behl and Weightman, *Madhumalati*, _first half*

29 (W)
_reading:_ Behl and Weightman, *Madhumalati*, _second half*

May 1 (F)
_reading:_ Richard M. Eaton, _from_ The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, “Mass
Conversion to Islam: Theories and Protagonists,” “The Rooting of Islam in Bengal,” “Conclusion”

discuss film essay

week 6—Alternative Voices

3 (Sun)
screening (7:00, Rockefeller 003): Meera (dir. Gulzar, 1979)

4 (M)

film discussion: Meera

6 (W)

8 (F)

week 7—Both Hindu and Muslim, or Neither?

3 (Sun)
screening (view on your own time in preparation for Monday’s class): Had Anhad (dir. Shabnam Virmani, 2008)

11 (M)

film discussion: Had Anhad

discuss history essay

12 (Tue)

film essay due, 5:00

13 (W)
readings: Hess and Singh, The Bijak of Kabir, “Appendix A: Upside-Down Language,” “Ramaini”; also sample some of the short compositions in “Sakhi”

15 (F)
reading: Dean Accardi, “Orientalism and the Invention of Kashmiri Religion(s)”
week 8—Sikhism

18 (M)

20 (W)

22 (F)
discuss final paper

week 9—Truth, Voice, Power

26 (Tue)
history essay due, 5:00 pm

27 (W)

29 (F)
reading: Karline McLain, “Be United, Be Virtuous: Composite Culture and the Growth of Shirdi Sai Baba Devotion”

in-class screening: “Shirdi Wale Sai Baba” (*Amar Akbar Anthony*)

week 10—Beyond Syncretism

June 1 (M)

9 (Tue)
**Final Paper Due: 5:00 PM**