Course Description

Where is South Asia? What is it to be Desi?

In this course, interdisciplinary in scope, we will explore connections among religion, literature, social organization, and film in the formation of cultures in South Asia. These sites will be examined as interconnected facets of historical and contemporary identities. While hardly a comprehensive survey of the region’s cultures, the course will introduce representative themes and debates from a range of temporal, geographical, and social locations in South Asia and invite attention to their impact on the rest of the world.

There are four full books on the reading list. Of these, two are literary works: *Sakuntala*, a classical play translated from Sanskrit, and *Basti*, a modern novel translated from Urdu. The other two can be considered the course textbooks. Each supplies the armature that structures one half of the class. This bipartite course design plays to the professional strengths and biases of your instructor, who wears two hats—as a historian of religions and as an ethographer.

In Weeks One through Five we will follow a rough-and-ready historical scheme. Our guide through the historical record will be Fred Clothey’s *Religion in India: A Historical Introduction*. The choice of a book centered on religion to define the highlights of South Asian cultural history reflects my own background as a religious-studies specialist, and as a scholar specifically of India. But it also makes a statement about how important ideas, symbols, and stories representative of South Asian cultural expression have traditionally been taught in Western universities. (Note: Class discussion will open this tradition—alongside many others—to critique.)

The Clothey chapters have been assigned primarily as background reading. They are intended to provide historical context for the primary texts and other materials that will be the focus of discussion. There are two points about religion in South Asia I should stress right up front. South Asia is the geographical origin of no fewer than four traditions that claim status as world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. And South Asia is also, as a regional unit, the home of the majority of the world’s Muslims.

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*And what’s going on with all the wheel imagery?*
Weeks Seven through Ten will mark a shift to the contemporary scene, and to life practices as experienced by a diversity of ordinary people. The bulk of the readings in the course’s latter half comes from *Everyday Life in South Asia*, a collection of essays by ethnographers working across the South Asian region.

**Course Goals and Learning Objectives**

This course will encourage you to develop and express your ideas in more than one way. A typical class will proceed according to the following format: student presentation, informal lecture, class discussion.

A brief student presentation designed to illustrate the day’s topic will inaugurate most class sessions. This assignment will take the form of a) one or more visuals or b) a poem or other short literary selection, to be presented before the class (i.e., projected or read aloud). The presenter will then engage a round of questions from the instructor and fellow students about the material’s connection to the assigned reading. Presentation images and texts should be sourced from within the thematic parameters indicated for each week on this syllabus.

The class discussion segment will encourage students to communicate ideas dynamically and verbally. Many of our discussions 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.

The main assignments are a midterm exam and a final paper. They emphasize research and writing skills in different ways. The exam will be organized according to a short-answer format designed to encourage close reading (and attentive review) of the assigned texts. The final assignment will involve you in library research on a topic of interest to you and relevance to themes discussed in the course; you will organize and present your work in the form of a thesis-driven long essay.

**Prerequisites:** There are no formal course prerequisites for AMES 19, which is an introductory level class. If you enter with some prior knowledge of the religion, history, or politics of South Asia—through personal experience, academic study, or both—the information and insights you offer will be a valuable resource. But when you contribute, take care to do so in such a way that opens up discussion for the whole classroom community. And if you enroll with little preparation, look to careful reading of the assigned material to get you up to snuff in the opening weeks, and participate with confidence.

Note that among the assigned texts are three Hindi-language mass-market (“Bollywood”) films. These are examples of popular cinema, produced as crowd-pleasers. Attend the screenings expecting to enjoy yourselves, but also prepared to take notes over a period of up to three hours. You will be required to write a short essay on the film of your choice.
Required Books and Films

Fred W. Clothey, Religion in India: A Historical Introduction (abbreviated in Course Schedule as RI)

Intazar Husain, trans. Frances Pritchett, Basti

Kalidasa, trans. W. J. Johnson, The Recognition of Sakuntala

Diane P. Mines and Sarah Lamb, eds., Everyday Life in South Asia (abbreviated in Course Schedule as ELSA)

Textbooks may be purchased at Wheelock Books. Note that the syllabus incorporates numerous reading assignments taken from sources outside of these books. You will be able to access these readings online through the links provided or as scans posted to Blackboard.

Bawarchi (dir. Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1972)

The Other Half of Tomorrow (dirs. Sameena Quraeshi and Sadia Shepard, 2012)

Lage Raho Munna Bhai (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2006)

Utsav (dir. Girish Karnad, 1984)

It is highly recommended that you view the films together with your classmates at the screenings scheduled for Sunday evenings. Films will also be made accessible through the library’s reserves and streaming services.

Course Requirements

1. Class Participation: 20%
2. Presentation: 10%
3. Midterm Exam: 25%
4. Film Essay, 5 pp.: 15%
5. Final Project, 10+ 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 part of your class participation grade and that more than two unexcused absences will put that grade at risk.
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. **Please turn in all written assignments to me** (or my office mailbox) on paper, unless otherwise specified. It’s up to you to print it out in time, not up to me.

8. **Late assignment policy:** Note that the due dates for the two biggest assignments are fixed. *The midterm exam is due before the film screening on Sunday, 20 October.* Midterms turned in after the 7:00 mark will incur a three-point penalty for every day they are late. I will announce the prompts to all of you at the same time and so fairness requires that you have the same amount of time to complete the assignment. *The final paper is due at 5:00 on 27 November, 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. If you need help with the assignments—whether your concerns are time-related, text-related, or anything else—consider me your first stop.

9. **Punctuality, yours and mine:** I will do my best to start class on time, and I really don’t like to deprive latecomers of important information, so I hope you also do your best to arrive on time. I confess to the bad habit of allowing class discussions to run overtime. Consider yourself notified: Class ends at TBA sharp. If we’re still talking, you may choose to stick around in the classroom out of interest or courtesy, but you are under no obligation to do so.
10. **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 a) in control of the situation; and b) 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: [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/regulations/undergrad/acad-honor.html]*.

**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/]*.

**Additional Support for your Learning**

*Academic Skills Center: [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/]*.

*Research Center for Writing, and Information Technology (RWiT): [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~rwit/]*.
Course Schedule

week 1—Locating Our Chakras

Sept. 16 (M)
introductions of: members of the class; the general scheme of the class; its goals and standards; some basic terms and concepts: Where is South Asia?

18 (W)

20 (F)

week 2—The Wheel of the Law

thematic parameters: South Asia from prehistory to the Common Era

23 (M)
readings: Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, “Vedas 2.2: Myths” and “Vedas: 2.3: Philosophy,” selections; RI, “The Early Urban Period”

25 (W)

27 (F)

week 3—The Cycle of Rebirth

thematic parameters: South Asia in the Common Era to 1000

29 (Sun)
screening, 7:00 (room TBA): Utsav (dir. Girish Karnad, 1984)

30 (M)
film discussion
reading: Mallanaga Vatsyayana (trans. Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar), Kamasutra, selections

Oct. 2 (W)
reading: Kalidasa, The Recognition of Sakuntala, first half
4 (F)
reading: Kalidasa, The Recognition of Sakuntala, second half

week 4—Discus and Nimbus

thematic parameters: South Asia from 1000 to 1600

7 (M)
readings: Richard Davis, “Trophies of War”; RI, “The Coming of Islam”

9 (W)
readings: Sunil Sharma, Amir Khusrau: Poet of Sultans and Sufis, selections; Richard Davis, “Images Overthrown”; RI, “Developments in the Late Medieval Period”

11 (F)
readings: Christopher Shackle and Arvind-pal Singh Mandair, Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from the Sikh Scriptures, selections
assign midterm exam

week 5—The Sun Never Sets

thematic parameters: South Asia from 1600 to 1900

14 (M)
readings: Partha Chatterjee, “Five Hundred Years of Love and Fear”; RI, “Streams from the ‘West’ and Their Aftermath”

16 (W)

18 (F)

week 6—The Spinning Wheel

thematic parameters: South Asia from 1900 to 1950

20 (Sun)
screening, 7:00 (room TBA): Lage Raho Munna Bhai (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2006)
midterm exam due before screening
film discussion

reading: M. K. Gandhi, *Village India*, selections

reading: Intazar Husain, *Basti*, first half

readings: Intazar Husain, *Basti*, second half; Faiz Ahmed Faiz, “Yeh Daagh Daagh Ujala,”

week 7—The Domestic Sphere

thematic parameters: post-1947 South Asia, focus on gender and family

28 (M)
readings: Susan S. Wadley, “One Straw from a Broom Cannot Sweep: The Ideology and Practice of the Joint Family in Rural North India” (ELSA); Mark Liechty, “Out Here in Kathmandu: Youth and the Contradictions of Modernity in Urban Nepal” (ELSA)

30 (W)
readings: Patricia Jeffrey and Roger Jeffrey, “Allah Gives Both Boys and Girls” (ELSA); Naveeda Khan, “In Friendship: A Father, a Daughter and a Jinn” (ELSA)

Nov. 1 (F)
reading: Michele Ruth Gamburd, “Breadwinners No More: Identities in Flux” (ELSA); Cari Costanzo Kapur, “Rethinking Courtship, Marriage, and Divorce in an Indian Call Center” (ELSA)

week 8—Social Circles

thematic parameters: post-1947 South Asia, focus on caste and class

screening, 7:00 (Thornton 104): *Bawarchi* (dir. Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1972)

4 (M)
film discussion

readings: “Seven Prevalent Misconceptions about India’s Caste System” (ELSA); Viramma *et al.*, “High and Low Castes in Karani” (ELSA)

6 (W)

discuss final project
8 (F)  
*readings*: Sara Dickey, “Anjali’s Alliance: Class Mobility in Urban India” (ELSA); Lucia Michelutti, “The Vernacularization of Democracy: Political Participation and Popular Politics in North India”

**week 9—(Synchronic?) Time Pass**

*thematic parameters: post-1947 South Asia, focus on leisure and pleasure*

11 (M)  
*reading*: Magnus Marsden, “Muslim Village Intellectuals: The Life of the Mind in Modern Pakistan” (ELSA); Laura Ring, “A Day in the Life” (ELSA)  
*film essay due*

13 (W)  
*readings*: Nita Kumar, *Friends, Brothers, and Informants, selections*; McKim Marriott, “The Feast of Love” (ELSA)

15 (F)  
*readings*: Anand Pandian, “Cinema in the Countryside: Popular Tamil Film and the Remaking of Rural Life” (ELSA); Purnima Mankekar, “Dangerous Desires: Erotics, Public Culture, and Identity in Late-Twentieth-Century India” (ELSA)

**week 10—From Chakra to Chukka**

18 (M)  
*reading*: Arjun Appadurai, “Playing with Modernity: The Decolonization of Indian Cricket”  
*in-class screening*: *The Other Half of Tomorrow* (dirs. Sakina Quraeshi and Sadia Shepard, 2012), *selections*

27 (W)  
**Final Project Due: 5:00 IN MY MAILBOX, AMES OFFICE**