**SAST2050**

**Classics of Indian Literature: 1200 BC – 1400 AD**

**Fall, 2017**

# Faculty: Richard J. Cohen

**Time & Place: T-TR: 9:30am - 10:45, Room 395, New Cabell Hall**

**Office Hours: TR 11-12:30, Room 136, New Cabell Hall**

We will explore South Asian civilizations through their ‘classic’ texts. I use single quotes around classic because what exactly is a classic text is usually determined by the politics of culture, as well as the academy, and that can be, as you might imagine, a contestable and controversial business. Therefore, the texts we will encounter in this course have been chosen to represent diverse, competing voices.

Each text we read – and we will debate them in class – will be presented in the cultural and political context they were created, as well as the contemporary context of academia, which has been known on more than one occasion to accept blithely, without enough debate, their relevance in the overall canon of South Asian literature.

You will learn how to practice the art of hermeneutics, which is just a fancy way of saying that you will be analyzing texts from the inside out. Interpreting ancient texts, texts that have come to us from a span of over two thousand years, is *prima facie* fraught with pitfalls. The first question we ask ourselves is: am I in a position to understand this text? Can we possibly crawl into the skin of an author of a text written in 500 BC? At best, we can analyze the intellectual content and rhetorical style of the text, whether it is religious, exegetical, literary, philosophical, historical. We will be discovering what it is that is unique about South Asian culture, i.e., “Is there a South Asian way of thinking?” This course provides the hard to attain experience of looking at the world through the lens of another culture’s deep history – and South Asian culture is *very deep*.

These course fulfill the ‘non-western’ requirement of the university. Since you will be required to write papers totaling at least 5,000 words, I will accept and sign requests for fulfillment of the ‘second writing requirement’ of the university.

The syllabus begins with definitions: what do we mean by “India, Indians and Indian civilization”? This is followed by a brief survey of the earliest known South Asian civilization: the Indus Valley Culture (ca. 2000 BCE). We then proceed to the Vedic period (1200 – 500 BCE), reading samples from the earliest known South Asian texts, and relate them to other contemporary Indo-European languages and movement of Indo-European people between 2000 and 1200 BCE. From there we familiarize ourselves with the Buddhist and Jain resistance against societal norms determined by Brahmans ca. 500 BCE. Next on our list are the social laws as expressed in Manu’s *Dharmashāstra*. We then consider samples from the two great Sanskrit epics, the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, the latter being the longest epic poem of any culture, and containing folk themes that have penetrated India’s many diverse regional cultures. We will sample examples of the finest Sanskrit love poetry (*kāvya*), then bring the course to a close with an example of a medieval Indian Sufi romance, highlighting the complex mingling of Hindu and Islamic cultural values.

**Requirements and Grading:**  
**This is a combination lecture and seminar style course.**  It requires full engagement with the texts, so that class time can be used productively through interactive discussion and focused lectures. **Therefore, laptops and cell phones will not be used in class.** **Attendance will be taken.** **A *grading rubric* is posted on the course Collab site “Resource” link that I use to evaluate your written work.** It should help you organize your thoughts, when writing the response papers. The response papers (minimum 1,250 words, maximum 1,500 words) should focus on the topics we discussed in the classes preceding the class in which they are due. It will be up to you to decide how to approach the composition of the response paper. One suggestion is to compare and contrast the major themes and ideas covered in the texts, lectures, discussions and any other forms of media content presented, such as videos, photographs, audio, etc. Adding your opinions will improve the quality of the response paper.  
  
**Grading will be based on: (1) the quality and timeliness of four response papers (minimum 1,250 words, maximum 1,500) (50%); (2) final exam (15%); (4) attendance and quality of participation in class discussion (35%). You can’t be shy in this class – you will be expected to bring your thoughts and opinions with you to class and *express* them.**

**Grade thresholds are as follows:**

**98 – 100 (A+), 95 – 97.99 (A), 91 – 94.99 (A-), 87.5 – 90.99 (B+), 83. 5 – 87.4 (B), 81 – 83.4 (B-), 77.5 –80.99 (C+), 73.5 – 77.4 (C), 71 – 73.4 (C-), 67.5 – 70.99 (D+), 63.5 – 67.4 (D), 61 – 63.4 (D-), 60.99 or less (F). Please note that the grade of A minus (A-) begins at 91%.**

**Evaluation and grading of the four response papers will be based on the “grading rubric” posted on the Collab site, in the top level folder in the “Resources” link.**

**Readings:**

Some readings will be posted on the Collab site. However, you should purchase the following books (they will be available at the UVa bookstore or from Amazon.com).

**Prices below denote new/used prices at the UVA bookstore.**  
**R.K. NARAYAN: *RAMAYANA* (latest edition with introduction by Pankaj Mishra ) - 0-14-303967-9 - $16.00/$12.00**

**WENDY DONIGER / *HINDU MYTHS* - 0-14-044990-6 - $17.00/$12.75**

**R.K. NARAYAN / *MAHABHARATA* - 0-226-05165-X - $17.00/$12.75**

**SAST2050 Fall 2017 Weekly Schedule**

**August**

22 Tuesday**:** the syllabus, methodology and approach of the class.

* Read Chapter One (“Introduction”) to Trautmann’s book, (**This reading and subsequent readings from the Trautmann book are on Collab in the folder named for the author** – it will provide a basic orientation to the cultural, linguistic and geographical diversity of India. **Be sure to have read this assignment (Chapter One) before the first class.**

24 Thursday: lecture and class discussion on what we know and how we know about the “Indus Civilization.”

* Read Trautmann, Chapter Two (“The Beginnings of Indian Civilization”) **on Collab**, pp 16 – 31.

29 Tuesday: What are some of the important, unique characteristics of Indian culture?

* Read and prepare to give **your** reactions to A. K. Ramanujan’s article “Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?” (**on Collab)**

31 Thursday: I will introduce the “Vedic Period” and its literatures, and solicit your opinions on why Indians perceive the Vedas as the foundational texts of Hinduism.

* Read Trautmann, Chapter Three “The Vedic Age”, pp 32 – 47. **On Collab**
* Read the “Introduction” to Doniger’s *Hindu Myths*, pp 11 – 22.

**SEPTEMBER**

5: Tuesday: Two approaches to interpreting Vedic literature.

* Sri Aurobindo and his interpretation of the Vedas. Read “The Secret of the Veda” **(on Collab in folder “Vedic India”)**
* A western scholar’s approach to interpreting the Vedas. Read Wendy Doniger’s “Introduction” to her book titled *The Rig* Veda, p. 2 to the middle of p. 7 of the PDF file “The Veda” which is **on Collab, in the folder “Vedic India”).**

7 Thursday: Various versions of the “creation” in ancient Indian literature.

* Read pp 25 – 55 in Wendy Doniger’s *Hindu Myths* (one of the books you purchased).
* Read pp. 16 – 17 **from the PDF file “The Veda” (on Collab)**: “Creation Hymn (Nasadiya)” and “The Unknown God, the Golden Embryo.”

12 Tuesday: two other important Vedic deities and hymns.

* Read “I Pray to Agni” p. 8 **from the PDF file “The Veda” (on Collab).**
* Read “Agni” pp. 97 – 115 from Wendy Doniger’s *Hindu Myths*.
* Read about the important Vedic deity Indra, “King of the Gods,” pp. 9 – 15 **from the PDF file “The Veda” (on Collab)**; and pp. 56 – 96 from Doniger’s *Hindu Myths*.

**First Response Paper Due BY START OF CLASS on tuesday sept. 12**

* **Post your paper in the ‘drop box’ on the course collab site.**

14 Thursday: other Vedic hymns.

* Read pp. 19 – 44 **from the PDF file “The Veda” (on Collab).**

19 Tuesday: The major socio-religious resisters to Vedic religion and society: Buddhism and Jainism.

* Read and prepare for discussion from Trautmann book, Chapter Four (“New Religions, New Empires”), pp 48 – 61, **on Collab in the Trautmann folder.**
* **Read the “Banyan Deer Jataka”** in the “Buddhism folder which is in the “Heterodoxies” folder **(on Collab)**.

21 Thursday: More about the resisters.

* Read “The Story of Yashodhara” in the Jainism folder which is in the “Heterodoxies” folder (**on Collab)**.
* Read the file “Jainism” in the “Jainism folder which is in the “Heterodoxies” folder (**on Collab)**.

26 Tuesday: The Development of Theistic “Hindu” Dharma; the transformation of Shiva

* Read pp. 116 – 174 in Wendy Doniger’s *Hindu Myths*.

28 Thursday: The Development of Theistic “Hindu” Dharma; the transformation of Vishnu

* Read pp. 175 – 237 in Wendy Doniger’s *Hindu Myths*.

**OCTOBER**

3 Tuesday: Reading Day, no class.

5 Thursday: The many forms of the Goddess.

* Read pp. 238 – 269 in Wendy Doniger’s *Hindu Myths*. **Prepare your remarks in reaction to Doniger’s text.**

10 Tuesday: The “classical” Indian civilization.

* Read Chapter Five (“Classical India”), pp. 62 – 84 **on Collab in the Trautmann folder**, and prepare your reactions for discussion in class.
* We will discuss the many meanings of the word *dharma*, and its rise to prominence in such classical texts as *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

**Second Response Paper due by the beginning of class on October 10th. Upload the paper to the Drop Box on Collab.**

12 Thursday: Begin our study of the *Mahabharata*.

* Read the front matter to R. K. Narayan’s *The Mahabharata, A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*, including Wendy Doniger’s “Foreword,” “List of Characters and Places of Action in the Story,” “Generation Tree” and Narayan’s “Introduction.
* Read Chapters 1 & 2, “The Eighth Baby” and “Enter – The Players.”

17 Tuesday: Continue with our study of the *Mahabharata*.

* Read Chapters 3 – 6.

19 Thursday: Continue with our study of the *Mahabharata*.

* Read Chapters 7 – 9.

24 Tuesday: Continue with our study of the *Mahabharata*.

* Read Chapters 10 – 13.

26 Thursday: Continue with our study of the *Mahabharata*.

* Read Chapters 14, 15, 16 and the Epilogue.

31 Tuesday: Begin our study of the *Ramayana*.

* Read the following: the two “Introductions” by Pankaj Mishra (pp. vii – xvi), and R. K. Narayan (pp. xxiii – xv), the “List of Characters (pp xxvii – xxviii) and the “The Prologue” (pp. 3 – 6).

**NOVEMBER**

2 Thursday: Continuing our study of the *Ramayana*.

* Read Chapters 1 – 3(Rama’s Initiation, The Wedding, Two Promises Revived).

7 Tuesday: Continuing our study of the *Ramayana*.

* Read Chapters 4 – 6 (Encounters in Exile, The Grand Tormentor, Vali).

9 Thursday: Continuing our study of the *Ramayana*.

* Read Chapters 7 – 14 + Epilogue.

**THIRD RESPONSE PAPER DUE. PLACE YOUR PAPER IN THE COLLAB DROP BOX BY THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON NOVEMBER 9TH.**

14 Tuesday: Introduction to Sanskrit Love Poetry.

* Read “Introduction to Sanskrit Language and Poetry”, in Collab Folder “Sanskrit Poetry.”
* Read “Obscenity in Sanskrit Literature,” in Collab Folder “Sanskrit Poetry.”

16 Thursday: Discuss Sanskrit Love Poetry.

* Read file titled “Sanskrit Poetry Readings” in Collab Folder “Sanskrit Poetry.”
* I will assign sections of the above reading to which each student will respond.

21 Tuesday: Begin our study of a medieval Indian Sufi romance.

* Read Chapter 9 “Turks and Mughals” in Trautmann, file is on Collab in the “Trautmann” folder.
* Read pp. 1 – 17 from my translation of the *Chandayan*.

28 Tuesday: Continue our study of the *Chandayan*.

* Read pp. 17 – 56, up through Chapter 56

30 Thursday: Continue our study of the *Chandayan*.

* Read pp. 57 – 101 up through Chapter 243.

**DECEMBER**

5 Tuesday: Continue our study of the *Chandayan*.

* Read pp. 101 – end of *Chandayan*.

**FOURTH RESPONSE PAPER DUE. PLACE YOUR PAPER IN THE DROP BOX ON COLLAB BY THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON DECEMBER 5TH.**

The final exam will be a take-home essay that will ask you to pull together several over-arching themes present throughout the texts we will discuss during the semester. More details about the final take-home essay will be given near the end of the semester.