

RLST 325: RELIGION AND NARRATIVE IN SOUTH ASIA (Fall 2011)
W 3:10-6:00
Wilson 1-154

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course, we will read literary novels from modern India alongside narratives not marked or marketed as “literature,” paying particular attention to the interrelations of the novel, folklore, and “mythology.” During the semester, we will ask two sets of questions about literary texts. First, how is literature best interpreted? What strategies for textual analysis are most appropriate to the study of religion and literature, and how can modes of reading devised within literary studies be extended to the academic study of religion? Second, what kind of a cultural entity is “literature”? How does it fit into a wider field of narrative culture—what we might, borrowing from Salman Rushdie, call the “sea of stories”? How does literature poach on other modes of storytelling (scripture, folklore, mythology, etc), and what kinds of publics are hailed by different narrative media?

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To develop skills in literary and textual analysis
- To learn key concepts in the study of religion and culture
- To learn about narrative cultures of modern India
- To practice skills in academic essay writing and discussion

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- **10% Participation:** This is first and foremost a discussion-based seminar, and so regular, thoughtful, and informed participation will be a major course requirement. In order to contribute successfully to our conversations, you will have to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading. This means not only having read material and read it well, but also having reflected on the material before coming to class. The quality and the quantity of your contributions will be noted and will determine your final participation grade.
- **30% Annotation and Analytic Sketches:** See instructions on handout.
- **25% Paper # 1:** R. K. Narayan (5pp): See instructions on handout.
- **35% Paper #2: Comparative** (10-12pp): Divakaruni and Rushdie: See instructions on handout. Class presentation of thesis argument included in paper grade.

COURSE POLICIES:

- **Attendance:** Because this seminar meets only once weekly, even a single absence will put you behind in the course. I understand that due to illness and other emergencies some students may need to miss one meeting. In order to accommodate such emergencies, each student will be permitted one discretionary absence. Missing more than one week, even for valid reasons, will be detrimental to your performance in the course. Consequently, each additional absence will reduce the final grade one third (A becomes A-, etc.). Chronic or extreme tardiness will be counted as absence.
- **Late Papers and Assignments:** All assignments should be turned in on time. If an assignment is turned in late, its final grade will be lowered by one letter per day. Thus, the highest possible grade for a paper turned in one day late would be a B. Papers turned in one minute after the deadline will be considered a full day late. Extensions will not be granted unless arrangements have been made at least one week in advance.
- **Academic Dishonesty:** Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. All references to ideas from books, articles, or other sources must be cited correctly. If you do not know how to properly reference your work, or you are in doubt whether or not you should cite material, refer to the *Student Academic and Conduct Guidelines*, or make an appointment to see the instructor to discuss the problem. Any student caught cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise engaged in academic dishonesty will fail the course and be reported to the Dean of Students.
- **Discussion Guidelines:** Religion is by nature a contentious subject matter, and thus promises to keep our conversations lively. Our task in this class will be to analyze religion as a cultural phenomenon, not to tout our own beliefs or disparage those of others. Critical thinking is a must, and it is likewise imperative that everyone approach religious texts and traditions with appropriate respect.
- **Support Services:** Montana State University provides a variety of services to ensure that you thrive, academically and otherwise. If you have a particular physical or learning disability that requires special accommodation, please contact both me *and* the Office of Disability, Re-entry, and Veterans Services (180 Strand Union Building; x2824). Otherwise, if you think that a health problem, a family emergency, or some other life event will adversely affect your academic performance, you should contact the Dean of Students for support (174 Strand Union Building; x2826).
- **Writing Guidelines:** Good writing is revised writing. The best writers generate multiple drafts and enlist the help of readers in order to produce a smooth final product: you are no exception. A top-level paper will not only demonstrate technical mastery (i.e. it will be devoid of grammatical and stylistic errors); it will also possess a clear organizational scheme that bolsters its major argument. Top papers will advance a strong thesis statement and will support that statement with ample citations from appropriate primary and secondary sources.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

R. K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons and Others*

R. K. Narayan, *The Guide*

Kirin Narayan and Urmila Devi Sood, *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon*

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Palace of Illusions*

All required texts are available for purchase in the campus bookstore. On the schedule of readings, articles posted to electronic course reserves at the library website are indicated by (CR). Readings are to be completed *in advance* of the date on which they are listed.

I: CHARTING THE SEA OF STORIES

- 8/31 Preliminaries
Film: *Sita Sings the Blues* (dir. Nina Paley, 2008, USA)
- 9/7 Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Ch. 1-6
Stanley Fish, "How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Interpretation" (CR)
Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" (CR)
Raymond Williams, "Culture" and "Literature" (CR)
Due: Annotation
- 9/14 Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Ch. 7-12
Aron Aji, "All Names Mean Something" (CR)
Jonathan Franzen, "The Reader in Exile" (CR)
Due: Analytic Sketch 1

II: FOLKLORE, SCRIPTURE, MYTHOLOGY

- 9/21 Kirin Narayan, *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon*, Introduction and Part I
Walter Ong, "Orality and Literacy" (CR)
Due: Analytic Sketch 2
- 9/28 Kirin Narayan, *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon*, Part II and Afterword
Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage*, selections (CR)
George Steiner, "On Reading Marshall McLuhan" (CR)
Due: Analytic Sketch 3
- 10/5 R. K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons, and Others*, pp. 1-98
Francis Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and Print" (CR)
Adrian Johns, "The Book of Nature and the Nature of the Book" (CR)
Due: Analytic Sketch 4

10/12 R. K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons, and Others*, pp. 99-238
Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics" (CR)
Due: Analytic Sketch 5

III: THE ENGLISH NOVEL IN INDIA

10/19 R. K. Narayan, *The Guide*, Introduction and Ch. 1-6
Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Ch. 2-3 (CR)
Due: Analytic Sketchbook

10/26 R. K. Narayan, *The Guide*, Ch. 7-11
Patrick Swindon, "Gods, Demons, and Others in the Novels of R. K. Narayan" (CR)

11/2 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, Parts 1-3
Michel de Certeau, "Reading as Poaching" (CR)
Due: Paper #1 (Narayan)

11/9 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, Parts 4-6
Simona Sawhney, "Satanic Choices: Poetry and Prophecy in Rushdie's Novel" (CR)

11/16 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, Parts 7-9
Lisa Appignesi, *Rushdie File*, selections (CR)

11/23 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

11/30 Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Palace of Illusions*, Ch. 1-23
Student Presentations

12/7 Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Palace of Illusions*, Ch. 23-43
Student Presentations

➤ **Paper #2 is due at 12 noon on Monday Dec. 12.**