

**Columbia Religion Department, RELI G6213 (4 Credits)  
Penn South Asian Studies, SAST 645 (3 credits)  
Fall 2021**

**Topics in Modern South Asia: Penn-Columbia Seminar**

Venues -

Columbia room: Department of Religion, 80 Claremont, Room 201  
Penn room : 826 Williams Hall  
and Zoom!

Professor Davesh Soneji, Williams Hall, Room 815, University of Pennsylvania  
dsoneji@upenn.edu

Professor Jack Hawley, 219 Milbank Hall, Barnard College, Columbia University  
jsh3@columbia.edu

Professor Rachel Fell McDermott, 321 Milbank Hall, Barnard College, Columbia University  
rmcdermo@barnard.edu

**Class hours: Fridays 1:30-4:30 p.m.**

**Office hours:** As requested; please email us

\* \* \* \* \*

This seminar is intended for graduate students of any relevant department at the MA or PhD level who are interested in the study of religion in modern South Asia. Specific topics include: Islam across the Indian Ocean; the Politics of Sanskrit in Indo-Muslim Contexts; Religion and Colonialism; Religion and Art History; Aesthetics, Politics, and Performance; South Asian Devotional Traditions; Religion and the Environment; Caste, Religion, and the Politics of Exclusion; and Religious Nationalism and Majoritarian Politics. The course will be co-taught by Professors Davesh Soneji of the University of Pennsylvania, and Professors Rachel McDermott and Jack Hawley of Columbia University, and will alternate between campuses and between in-person and zoom platforms.

Since Penn and Columbia are both heavily invested in the graduate training of students in the various sub-disciplines of South Asia Studies, this course has been created so that students and faculty at each institution can meet each other and benefit from each other's expertise.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Course Goals**

Students in this course will come away from it with:

- (1) an understanding of selected topics in modern South Asian religious history through close reading of recent monographs;
- (2) an exposure to methodological approaches to teaching and learning that may be different from what they are used to in their own university departments – differences that will be

instructive for their own pedagogical development as emerging teachers;

(3) opportunities to practice conference-style presentations, in the classroom in response to the readings each week and in the presentation at the end of the semester of a conference-length original research paper; and

(4) the chance to research write an original piece of scholarship that will be vetted and commented upon by faculty and students in two major institutions of South Asia Studies.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Readings**

This is a reading-intensive seminar, with an average assignment of one 200-page monograph, or the equivalent, per week. All course readings are either uploaded as pdfs through Canvas or are e-books available through the Penn and Columbia library systems.

In general, students who wish to read from hard-copy texts are encouraged to order the books from whatever source they please, or find cheapest.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Class Schedule**

Please note that because we are losing two classes due to national conferences and one due to Thanksgiving, there will be twelve substantive classes – one introductory, ten in which we read and discuss monographs, and a final class in which students present their research work. The class will alternate between meeting with both groups together in person, and together by zoom. Each group travels to the other's campus three times during the course of the semester.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Travel**

The bus fare to and from Penn and Columbia will be subsidized for students. Details to be announced.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **The Work of the Course**

**(1) Friday, September 10: Introduction to the Course [meet on zoom]**

Meet and greet! Introductions and decisions about presentation dates.

**(2) Friday, September 17: Islam on the Indian Ocean [Columbia to Penn] [Chris Ahrens]**

Reading: Sebastian Prange, *Monsoon Islam.: Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Please read the Introduction, Chapters 2 and 4, and the Conclusion. [\[On-line resource\]](#).

**(3) Friday, September 24: Text-Critical Studies/Hermeneutics [meet on zoom] [Paul Roman]**

Reading: Audrey Truschke, *The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Indo-Muslim Rule* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021) [\[On-line resource\]](#).

**(4) Friday, October 1: Religion and Colonialism: Goa as Site of Encounter [Penn to Columbia] [Kaustubh Naik]**

Reading: Angela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov, *Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th to 18th Centuries)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), excerpts.

Alexander Henn, *Hindu-Catholic Encounters in Goa: Religion, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 2014) [\[On-line resource\]](#).

**(5) Friday, October 8: Religion, Art, and Art History [meet on zoom] [Tara Giangrande]**

Reading: Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Time of Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021). You may omit Chapter 4. [\[On-line resource\]](#).

**(6) Friday, October 15: Aesthetics, Politics, Performance [Columbia to Penn]**

Reading: Davesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) [\[On-line resource\]](#). [\[Raji Ranganathan\]](#)

**[Friday, October 22: Class cancelled, due to the South Asia Conference at Madison]**

**(7) Friday, October 29: South Asian Devotional Traditions (Part 1) [meet on zoom]**

Reading: Jack Hawley, *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). You may omit Chapters 3 and 5. [\[On-line resource\]](#). [\[Arundhati\]](#)

**Bhan]**

**(8) Friday, November 5: South Asian Devotional Traditions (Part 2) [Penn to Columbia]**

Reading: Rachel McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). [\[On-line resource\]](#). **[Priya Nambrath]**

Assignment due: Paper proposal, outline, and annotated bibliography for the final research essay.

**(9) Friday, November 12: Religion and the Environment [meet on zoom]**

Reading: Eliza F. Kent, *Sacred Groves and Local Gods: Religion and Environmentalism in South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) [\[On-line resource\]](#). **[Shweta Radhakrishnan]**

**(10) Friday, November 19: Caste, Religion, and the Politics of Exclusion [meet on zoom]**

Reading: Joel Lee, *Deceptive Majority: Dalits, Hinduism, and Underground Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) [\[On-line resource\]](#). **[Sidra Yousaf]**

**[Friday, November 26: class cancelled for Thanksgiving]**

**(11) Friday, December 3: Religious Nationalism and Majoritarian Politics [Columbia to Penn]**

Reading: Angana Chatterji, Thomas Hansen Bloom, and Christophe Jaffrelot, eds., *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), excerpts [\[On-line resource\]](#). **[Prateek Paul]**

**(12) Friday, December 10: Class Presentations [Penn to Columbia]**

Students will present their work, followed by a party and dinner

Wednesday, December 22: Final papers due by email to all three professors

## **Course Requirements:**

### **(1) One conference-style presentation: 20%**

Once during the course of the semester you will be asked to prepare an 8-10-page double-spaced paper in response to the assigned readings. In this paper, you should (1) summarize what you feel to be the author's (or authors') salient points and arguments, (2) describe where you feel the principal contributions to lie, and (3) and lift up what you feel to be the reading's (or readings') most interesting issues, questions, or debates, for us to address. These are not mere book reports, although you will want to spend a little time describing the author's arguments. The papers are meant to stimulate discussion. As presenter, you will stand up and deliver the paper, as if you were giving a conference address. When you are finished, all other members of the seminar will take turns responding orally both to your paper and to the reading, as if they were audience participants in a panel setting.

This paper and discussion will comprise the first hour of the class. During the second hour, the discussion will be led by the professor(s), but with plenty of student input. What else are you thinking about, in the relation to the reading, that has not yet come up? Please email or hand a hard copy of your presentation to each of the three professors, in advance of the class. This can be at the start of the class, if you wish.

You will decide as a group which weeks are allocated to which students. We will make these decisions on the first day of class, September 10, when we meet from our separate campuses through zoom.

### **(2) Participation in class discussions: 25%**

Please come prepared on weeks when you are not doing a conference-style presentation to make oral contributions that show your familiarity with and thought about the readings. There are no weekly response papers, so your oral involvement will demonstrate that you have done the readings carefully.

We do ask, however, that you bring reading notes – i.e. 2-3 pages of single-spaced notes (these can be bullet points, and/or handwritten if your handwriting is good!) that you have prepared on the reading, to support you in the comments that you make in class. Please bring in three hard copies of these notes, to give to the professors as class ends, or send them by attachment when we meet on zoom.

### **(3) Proposal, outline, and annotated bibliography for your research paper: 15%**

This course is intended to hone your professional skills – both in the writing of an important essay and in the oral presentation of your ideas. Please start thinking early regarding what you would like to write about, and give us an initial read of your ideas in a proposal, due November 5, 2021. Think of this as the sort of proposal that you would

submit to the American Academy of Religion, the South Asia Conference, or the Association of Asian Studies. It must show a command of the topic, a plan for its execution, and a bibliography that reflects the work upon which you will build.

We would like a minimum of 6-7 double-spaced pages for content-description, and 4-5 pages of annotated bibliography. The annotations do not have to be long, but should indicate in what way each title is useful to you in thinking through your topic.

**(4) Research essay 40%**

This essay is to be presented, again in a conference-style fashion, on the last day of class, December 10.

What you present on December 10 will be a 10-page double-spaced version of the 20-page double-spaced essay that you will turn in to us by email on December 22. Again, this is like a conference paper; what you present on a panel is only a small slice of the larger project on which you are actually working.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Grading**

You will receive comments by both Penn and Columbia faculty on everything we do jointly, but you will be graded by your own institution's faculty only.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Meeting professors for appointments**

Please be in touch with us if you want to meet in person, and we can arrange for appointments before or after class.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Statement on Disabilities Accommodations**

If you have been certified by Disability Services to receive accommodations, please either bring your accommodation letter from Disability Services to confirm your accommodation needs, or ask your liaison in the Graduate School to consult with us.

**WELCOME TO THE COURSE!**