

**Concepts: How to Read Hindu and Islamic Texts**  
**AS.070.465**  
**Mergenthaler 426**  
**Fridays, 2 - 4.30**

**Instructors:**

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**Tuesdays 1-3 or by appt.**

**Course Description**

What is the nature of anthropological concepts and what relations do they bear to concepts internal to a society? We invite students to think with key ideas from Hindu and Islamic traditions, asking if anthropological concepts are best seen as abstractions from the particular or as intertwined with ongoing lines of inquiry, say into the nature of the real and continual efforts to test it? Topics in ritual theory, grammar, aesthetics, translation, revelation, luminosity and figuration are among those to be considered.

This is an advanced course. Students will not be provided elementary introductions to the two traditions under consideration and will be expected to dive into readings. This will entail preparation to be able to situate the readings and the instructors can guide by discussing and suggesting additional readings during office hours. Students are encouraged to meet with Professors Das and Khan during office hours or by appointment to go over texts that may be difficult to understand.

All readings (except for one) are on electronic reserves to be accessed through the library catalog or blackboard. The one book that we will read by Stefania Pandolfo, *Knot of the Soul* (2018) is available online through the library catalog, or available in hard copy on reserve at the library front desk. You may also buy it from Barnes and Noble or online.

Requirements: Attendance is mandatory. Reading must be done ahead of class. Students must come with the readings ready at hand and prepared to discuss. You will be required to write one brief response (2 double spaced pages) on the readings from each of the six units. Please identify any **one** idea or **one** proposition in the text that you are finding difficult to understand and elaborate the obscurities or ellipses in the argument. Identify where you would need more information or evidence to evaluate or comprehend the claims of the author. Think of this exercise as a contribution to an imagined Encyclopedia of Ignorance! In all you will write 6 response papers – one on each unit but please ensure that 3 of these are on Islamic texts and 3 on Hindu/Buddhist texts. Response papers will be due one week after the concluding discussion session for each unit. There will be no final exams or papers.

**It is imperative that papers be submitted in time and students take permission from the instructors if they cannot attend class or submit the response paper in time.**

**February 1: Introduction to the course and distribution of syllabus.**

**Unit 1: Translation and Transmission**

**February 8: The (Un)Translatability of the Quran**

Brown, Norman O. 2009. "The Book." *The Challenge of Islam: The Prophetic Tradition, Lectures*. Santa Cruz: New Pacific Press, 45-59.

Asad, Talal. "Translation and the Sensible Body." In *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and the Calculative Reason*. New York: Columbia University Press, 55-98.

Fischer, Michael M.J. and Mehdi Abedi. "Qur'anic Dialogics: Islamic Poetics and Politics for Muslims and for Us." *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 95-149.

**February 15:**

Chakrabarti, Arindam, and Ralph Weber, eds. 2015. *Comparative Philosophy Without Borders*. Bloomsbury Publishing, [Introduction: pp. 1-19]

Gold, Jonathan C. 2008. *The Dharma's Gatekeepers: Sakya Paita on Buddhist Scholarship in Tibet*. Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2008.

[Chapter 2: Beware of the Dharma in Translation.. pp. 25-40]

[Chapter 6: Appealing to the Translocal. Pp. 117-140]

Rathore, Aakash Singh, and Rimina Mohapatra. 2016. *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation, with Texts* New Delhi: Oxford University Press

["On the episode of the Mahabharata known by the Name Bhagvad Gita", pp 87-139]

**Unit 2: Absence**

**February 22: Before Revelation**

Reinhart, A. Kevin. 1995. "Introduction and Overview," "The Three Positions." *Before Revelation: The Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1-76

**March 1:**

Pontillo, Tiziana, and Maria Piera Candotti, eds. 2013. *Signless Signification in Ancient India and Beyond*. Anthem Press,

[Elisa Freschi and Tiziana Pontilo "When One thing Applies More than Once: Tantra and Prasanga in Srautasutra, Mimamsa, and Grammar", pp. 33-98]

[Maria Piera and Tiziana Pontilo "The earlier Paninian Tradition: The Imperceptible Sign", pp. 99-154]

Additional/Optional Reading

Filliozat, Pierre-Sylvain. 1991-92. "Ellipsis, Lopa and Anuvrtti." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 72/73, No. 1/4, 675-687

*(This is a very technical paper and I am happy to schedule an extra meeting for those who want to read it – in some ways it shows how absence is simply there in everyday life in the way we use language and also how it is formalized in rules but which depend on some everyday common sense about proximity, anticipation, etc.)*

### **Unit 3: Notions of God/gods**

#### **March 8:**

Clooney, Francis X. 1997. "What's a God? The Quest for the Right Understanding of Devata in Brahmanical Ritual Theory." *International Journal of Hindu Studies*. Vol. 1 (2): 337-85

Das, Veena. Forthcoming "Concepts Crisscrossing" (typescript to be supplied)

Singh, Bhri Gupta. 2011 "Agonistic Intimacy and Moral Aspiration in Popular Hinduism: A Study in the Political Theology of the Neighbor." *American Ethnologist* 38, no. 3 430-450.

#### **March 15: God as Light**

Al-Ghazali. 1998. *The Niche of Lights*. Trans. David Buchman. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press.

Corbin, Henry. 1986. "The Realism and Symbolism of Colours in Shiite Cosmology." *Temple and Contemplation* London: KPI Ltd, 1-54.

Ewing, Katherine P. 1982. "Sufis and Adepts: Islamic and Hindu Sources of Spiritual Power among Punjabi Muslims and Christian Sweepers." In Steven Pastner and Louis Flam, eds. *Anthropology in Pakistan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 74-88.

### **SPRING BREAK March 18-24.**

### **Unit 4: Doubts, Dreams and Many Worlds**

#### **March 29:**

Chapple, Christopher Key, and Arindam Chakrabarti, eds. 2015 *Engaged Emancipation: Mind, Morals, and Make-believe in the Moksopaya (Yogavasistha)*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

[Garth Bregman. "The Existence of an Endless Number of Worlds: Jagadanantya in Moksopaya and the Many world Interpretation in Quantum Physics", Chapter 5, pp 97-118]  
[Maneha Ganesthasan, "Dreams, Fictions, and the Quest for Morality in the Yogavasistha" Chapter 10, pp. 189-218]

Hudson, Emily T. 2013 *Disorienting Dharma: Ethics and the Aesthetics of Suffering in the Mahabharata*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

["Introduction", pp. 3-49]

[Chapter 5, "Heaven's Riddles or the Hell Trick: Theodicies and Narrative Strategies"], pp., 178-215]

Mark Jurgensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson eds. 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*

[Das, Veena. Violence and Nonviolence at the Heart of Hindu Ethics. Chapter 1, pp. 15-40]

### **April 5: Vanquishing Doubt and Entertaining Madness**

Al-Ghazali. 1980. "Deliverance from Error." *Deliverance from Error, Five Key Texts Including His Spiritual Autobiography al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*. Trans. R. J. McCarthy. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 53-98.

Pandolfo, Stefania. 2018. "Testimony in Counterpoint," "Ta'bir: Figuration and the 'Torment of Life'" and Part III, *Knot of the Soul: Madness, Psychoanalysis, Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### **Unit 5: The Self and the Non-Self**

#### **April 12:**

Ganeri, Jonardon. 2007. *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology*. Oxford University Press on Demand.

[Part III: A Selfless Person's Sense of Self, Chapters 6 and 7, pp. 155-213]

Kaul, Mrinal, and Ashok Aklujkar. 2008 *Linguistic Traditions of Kashmir: Essays in Memory of Pandit Dinanath Yaksh*. New Delhi: DK Printworld, The Harabhata Shastri Indological Research Institute

[Bäumer, Bettina. "The Three Grammatical Persons and Trika: Chapter 5, pp.206-22.

#### **April 19: The Refracted Self**

Thanawi, Maulana Ashraf Ali. 1997. "Book 7, On Comportment and Character, Reward and Punishment." With "Translator's Introduction to Book Seven." *Bibishti Zewar: Perfecting Women*. Trans. Barbara Daly Metcalf. Lahore, Pakistan: Idara-e-Islamiyat, 163-239.

Sells, Michael. 1994. "Ibn-Arabi's Polished Mirror: Identity Shift and Meaning Event." *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 63-89.

Salomon, Carol. "The Cosmogonic Riddles of Lalan Fakir." In A. Appadurai, F. J. Korom and Margaret A. Mills eds. *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 267-305.

### **Unit 6: Aesthetics**

#### **April 26: Figural Encounters**

Burgel, Johann Christoph. 1988. "Love on Sight of Pictures': A Case Study in the Magic of the Pictorial Art." *The Feather of Simurgh: The "Licit Magic" of the Arts in Medieval Islam*. New York: New York University Press: 119-137.

Behl, Aditya and Wendy Doniger. 2012. "Bodies that Signify: The Madhumalati, Part 1." *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379-1545*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 218-263.

Chatterji, Roma. 2012. "Global Events and Local Narratives: 9/11 and the Chitrakars." *Speaking with Pictures: Folk Art and the Narrative Tradition in India*. New Delhi: Routledge, 62-106.

**May 3:**

Pollock, Sheldon. 2016 *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*. Columbia University Press, ["Introduction: An Intellectual History of Rasa", pp 1-46  
"Abhinavgupta and His School" , pp 181-238]

Pandit, Lalita. 1996. "Dhvani and the " Full Word": Suggestion and Signification from Abhinavagupta to Jacques Lacan." *College Literature* 23, no. 1): 142-163.

McCrea, Lawrence. 2004. "Mahimabhatta's Analysis of Poetic Flaws." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*: Vol. 124 (1)77-94.