



**Syllabus**  
*South Asian Religions*  
21:510:284

Fall 2023, Rutgers University-Newark  
Tuesdays 2:30 – 5:20 p.m. EST

**INSTRUCTOR**

Professor Audrey Truschke  
Department of History  
aat119@newark.rutgers.edu  
Office Hours and Location TBA

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

South Asia is one of the most religiously diverse places on earth, and this course offers a whirlwind tour of numerous traditions, including Indian tribal religions, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and more. We approach these religions from a variety of angles, analyzing both practices and beliefs. In the second half of the course, we take-up specific topics—such as appropriation, reform movements, and religious nationalism—to further understand South Asian religions and their modern resonances, as well as points of contestation.

In addition to learning about specific traditions and debates, students will become conversant with academic approaches to the study of religion, one of the most enduring and influential aspects of human society. Religion isn't a bed of roses for everyone, and we cover both fierce criticisms of traditions and religious offense, seeking to cultivate empathy and value multiple perspectives.

**SYLLABUS OVERVIEW**

General Information	Pages 1–4
Weekly Schedule & Readings	Pages 5–6

**PEDAGOGY 101 – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

We meet on Tuesdays 2:30–5:20 p.m.

Our Canvas class site has a module for each week, with all readings, assignments, and additional information.

The course has two sections: Traditions and Topics. First we focus on specific traditions (weeks 1–8), and then we turn to broader issues across religions (weeks 9–15).

The professor wants you to succeed; if you have issues or concerns, please be in touch.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students can expect the following through successful completion of this course:

Acquire basic knowledge about South Asian religions—ranging from tribal traditions to Christianity—including key practices and beliefs.

Learn strategies for approaching and making sense of primary sources.

Appreciate how South Asian religions have changed over time.

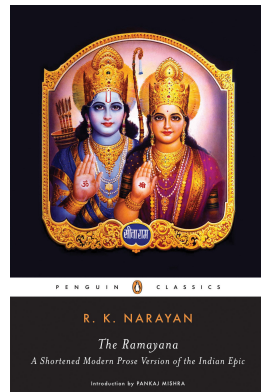
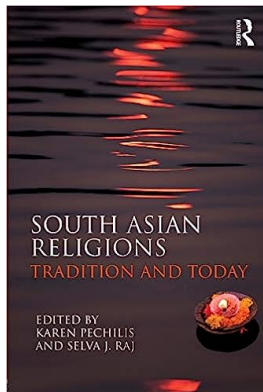
Learn to identify and confront bias, in yourself and others.

Learn how historians think rigorously about religion and assess multiple viewpoints.

Think with empathy about religious traditions.

## READINGS AND REQUIRED TEXTS

There are two required books in this course (see Canvas for access options). All other readings are on Canvas. Primary sources are marked as such on the syllabus.



## GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Your grade is based on four components:

Class Attendance and Participation	35%
4 short written assignments	25%
Brief in-class presentation	10%
Midterm Exam and Final Reflection	30%

**Class Attendance:** You are required to attend all classes. If you miss class, please talk to the professor.

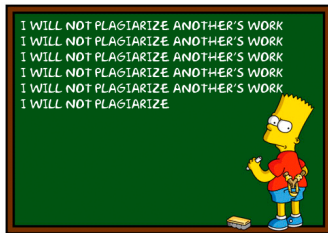
**Exams:** There is one exam, which is in-class.

## CLASS POLICIES

**Absences.** Attendance is required. For excused absences, please contact the professor, in advance if possible. If you find yourself missing class for other reasons, please reach out to the professor to discuss the best way to succeed in this course. Rutgers University policy on absences:

- *Excused Absences:* Recognized grounds for absence include illness requiring medical attention, curricular or extracurricular activities approved by the faculty, and recognized religious holidays. You must contact the professor, in advance where possible, or absences will be counted as unexcused.
- *Extended Absences:* Any student who misses four or more sessions through any combination of excused and unexcused absences will not earn credit in this class. Such students should withdraw to avoid getting an F.

**Academic Integrity.** The professor expects full academic honesty from all students. If you plagiarize, cheat, help another student cheat, consult ChatGPT or equivalent, or are otherwise academically dishonest, you will face disciplinary action. Don't want trouble? Don't Cheat. See: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>



Please include the Rutgers honor pledge on all major course assignments submitted for grading: “On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment).”

**Censorship and Offense.** The professor does not censor information or images, and the history of religions can be a difficult subject. As a result, students in this course may well encounter historical and contemporary texts, depictions, actions, and ideas that they find upsetting. This includes, but is not limited to, criticisms of religions, depictions of religious figures and deities, explicit sexuality, swastikas, discussions of caste, politicizations of religious traditions, and misogyny. Please remember that it is okay to feel offended. We will discuss in class how to sensitively address such feelings without whitewashing the diversity of religious traditions, both in the past and today.

**Electronics.** Electronics—including laptops, tablets, and phones—are not allowed in class. I encourage notetaking by hand.

**Intellectual Property.** Lectures, powerpoints, assignments, unpublished work, and other materials utilized in this course are protected by United States copyright laws as well as Rutgers University policy. You are not permitted to share any of these without written consent from the instructor. Similarly, all original work that you produce for this course is covered by copyright protections, and the instructor will not share your work without your written consent.

**Late Work.** All late work incurs a penalty of one letter grade (10% reduction) for every 24 hours late.

## SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

**Counseling Center.** The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. Students should reach out to the Counseling Center to schedule an appointment: [counseling@newark.rutgers.edu](mailto:counseling@newark.rutgers.edu) or (973) 353-5805. If students are not quite ready to make an appointment with a therapist but are interested in self-help, check out *Sanvello* for an easy, web-based approach to self-care and support. Visit <https://my.rutgers.edu/>, click on Sanvello: Wellness @ RUN, and log in with your netid to begin your journey toward wellness.

**Crisis and Concerns.** The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a plan of support plan and address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Connect with the CARE Team by using the following link: [tinyurl.com/RUNCARE](https://tinyurl.com/RUNCARE) or emailing [careteam@rutgers.edu](mailto:careteam@rutgers.edu).

**Disabilities.** The Office of Disability Services (ODS) works with students with medical, physical, and/or mental conditions who encounter disabling barriers in order to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodations for access. Students who have completed the process with ODS and have approved accommodations are provided a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) specific to each course. To initiate accommodations for their course students must both provide the LOA to and have a conversation with the course instructor about the accommodations. More information can be found at [ods.rutgers.edu](https://ods.rutgers.edu). Contact ODS: (973) 353-5375 or [ods@newark.rutgers.edu](mailto:ods@newark.rutgers.edu).

**Food.** PantryRUN, the campus food pantry, helps students who have difficulty affording enough healthy food to remain focused on their studies and stay healthy. You can find hours and information here: <https://myrun.newark.rutgers.edu/pantryrun>.

**Temporary Conditions/Injuries.** The Division of Student Affairs can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request for assistance at: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu>.

**Writing Center.** The Rutgers University-Newark Writing Center provides tutoring for students who want to strengthen their reading, writing, and research skills. They offer individual sessions and writing workshops to all undergraduate students currently enrolled in classes on the Rutgers University-Newark campus; they are offering remote tutoring. They can be contacted at (973) 353-5847 and [nwc@rutgers.edu](mailto:nwc@rutgers.edu). Also see: <https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/writing-center>.

## SECTION I: TRADITIONS

### Week 1: Sept 5 Introduction and Tribal Religions

---

Kujur, "Tribal Religions in India"

Religion 101, Episode 103: "Major Religions? Minor Religions? Must We?"

*Recommended Reading:* Davis, "Brief History of Religions in India," 3–52

### Week 2: Sept 12 Vedic Religion and Hinduism

---

Primary Source: Rig Veda, excerpts from books 2 and 3 (Jamison and Brereton trans.)  
Bronkhorst, "Brahmanism," 361–69

Narayanan, "Hindu traditions"

Primary Source: Narayan, "Draupadi," 143–61

### Week 3: Sept 19 Jainism

---

Kelting, "Jain Traditions"

Primary Source: "Story of King Yasodhara," 118–132 (Granoff trans.)

### Week 4: Sept 26 Buddhism

---

Goonasekera, "Buddhism in South Asia"

Primary Source: *Therigatha*, excerpts

Primary Source: *Life of the Buddha* 63–123 (every other page; Olivelle trans.)

### Week 5: October 3 Islam

---

Metcalf, "Historical Overview of Islam in South Asia"

Primary Source: Asher, "Pilgrimage to the Shrines in Ajmer," 77–85

Primary Source: Asani, "Satpanthi Ismaili Songs," 48–61

### Week 6: October 10 Dalit Religions and Criticisms

---

Chatterjee, "Dalits and Religion"

Primary Source: Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste"

BBC "Hidden Caste Codes of Silicon Valley (listen, 27 minutes)"

### Week 7: October 17 Sikhism

---

Singh, "Sikhism"

Primary Source: Guru Nanak, "Daily Worship," 3–35

### Week 8: October 24 Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism

---

Thangaraj, "South Asian Christianity"

Katz, "South Asian Judaisms"

\*In-class midterm exam

## SECTION II: TOPICS

### Week 9: October 31 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Critics and Reformers

---

Chowdhury-Sengupta, "Reconstructing Hinduism"

Primary Source: Vivekananda's 1893 speech

Primary Source: Rukhmabai's 1885 letter

### Week 10: Nov 7 Ramayana

---

Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Ramayanas"

Primary Source: Narayan, *Ramayana*

### Week 11: Nov 14 Art, Museums, and Offense

---

Appadurai and Breckenridge, "Museums are good to think," 173–82

Patel, "Lecturer Showed a Painting of the Prophet Muhammad"

Primary Source: Museum Visit (on your own time; see Canvas for options)

\*November 15: Museum visit reflection due

### Week 12: Nov 21 NO CLASS (Rutgers Thursday classes meet)

---

NO READINGS

### Week 13: Nov 28 Nation Making and Nationalism

---

Jaffrelot, Introduction to *Hindu Nationalism*, 3–25

Primary Source: Aurobindo Ghose (trans), "Hymn to the Mother" (Bande Mataram)

\**Raam ke naam* in-class screening

### Week 14: Dec 5 Yoga and Appropriation

---

Bucar, "Respite Yoga"

Udupa and Naik, "Hindu Nationalist Campaign to Promote Yoga"

### Week 15: Dec 12 Diaspora

---

Kurien, "Indian Religions in the United States"

Primary Source: Never Have I Ever, season 1, episode 4 (if you can)

"Religion, Race, and 'Never Have I Ever'" Roundtable