# HUMA 4775 3.0
South Asian Religions and Popular Culture*

**Thursdays, 8:30-11:30am**  
Bethune College 225

**Course Director:** Khyati Nagar  
**Email:** knagar@yorku.ca  
**Office hours:** Thurs 11:30-12:30pm or by appt  
**Office:** Room 109 Vanier College

**Description:**

The objective of this course is to inquire into how South Asian religions are represented, practiced, communicated, and transformed through popular culture. How are religious themes, images, and ideas explored in contemporary film, television, print media and music? What roles do language, gender, caste, literacy, and poverty play in the reading of cultural texts, and in the practice of religion? What can ‘popular culture’ mean in a subcontinent with more than 1.5 billion people, with hundreds of languages and multifarious religious traditions? How are ideas about religion transmitted and disseminated through the South Asian diaspora and around the world?

We will begin by considering historical contexts for ‘popular’ culture, studying some significant early and medieval art forms and their engagement with Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Sikhism. With this grounding, we will then move on to consider contemporary popular cultural forms like visual art, film, television, photography, and comics in their historical, regional and social contexts. Throughout the course, we will consider religion and popular culture in relation to colonialism, nationalism and communalist conflict. The course travels through India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, allowing us to explore several religious and cultural locations. In the latter part of the course, we will also consider South Asian religions in the diaspora and the role of globalization. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the History of Religions, the course draws on theory and research in cultural studies, art history and film studies.

**Required Readings:**

- Most readings will be available via Moodle  
- Two required books are available through the bookstore – *Sita’s Ramayana* and *Seva*  
- There are some films, web sites, or artworks that you will be expected to look at outside of class time

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*Course originally designed by Dr. Sailaja Krishnamurthi, revised by Khyati Nagar*
Assessments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Value (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar facilitation on assigned reading</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly reading journal</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research project proposal and bibliography</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major research project</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation (seminar discussions and final project talk)</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>100</td>
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**Written assignments:**

The weekly reading journal will ask students to write a short entry for each week, reflecting on one of the assigned readings. Each entry is about one page in length, and will be submitted via Moodle. I will evaluate these three times throughout the term.

The major research project consists of a 3000 to 4000 word paper or alternative project (e.g., creative writing, visual art, film - with approval from the course director). Each student will submit a proposal and bibliography in advance of the final project. Students will also make a short individual presentation to the class on their research topic. Details of assignments and presentation will be provided in class.

**Oral assignments:**

In addition to regular weekly participation in discussions, students will each individually lead a seminar on an assigned reading. There will be 1-2 presentations each week. In the final two classes, each student will each also speak for five minutes about their individual research project.

**Participation:**

In a senior seminar, the class is driven largely by student participation and engagement with the texts; a component of the final grade therefore assesses the level and quality of participation. Please show up on time having completed the readings for that session, and be prepared with questions/comments/provocations to share (this preparation could be the basis for your research journal.) If you are a person who isn't comfortable talking in front of a group, or if you have specific needs or challenges that might make this difficult for you, please see me to strategize around this issue and discuss alternatives.

**Course Policies and Important Information**

1. **Moodle**

   We will be using Moodle [http://moodle.yorku.ca](http://moodle.yorku.ca) in this course as a medium of communication and resource sharing. Links and readings will be posted here. You will find a Discussion Forum in which to post general and administrative questions, as well as items of interest to the class. Your weekly journal will be uploaded here.

2. **Office hours**

   I will hold regular office hours each week. Please take advantage of these times to share your questions with us and engage in further discussion. My weekly office hours are typically on a drop-in basis, but if a lengthy conversation is required, we can schedule a meeting.
3. Email and Communication
If you have general questions about the course, course materials, topics, or assignments, please make sure to review the course outline and information on Moodle first to seek the answer. If you cannot find what you need, send me an email.

You can always email me to request an appointment, to discuss confidential matters and/or issues (e.g., illness, request for extensions, accessibility issues, personal concerns, or specific questions about your work) that you do not want to share with others, and if you cannot attend office hours in person. In your subject line, always write HUMA 4775 and a few words regarding the purpose of your message.

4. Use of technology
Having technology in the classroom can be great IF you use it to: look at course materials; look up terms in the dictionary; find sources to research a topic; post a question to the discussion forum on Moodle; share something interesting you’ve found with the class; support your learning/accessibility needs. But use your time wisely. If it isn’t course-related, do it later.

5. Academic integrity
Academic dishonesty is a very serious offence, and covers a wide range of actions including cheating, plagiarism, submitting course work more than once, improper citations, and more. As senior students, you should be familiar with what constitutes academic dishonesty so that you can protect your own integrity as a student. The value of your university degree comes from the work that students must put in to achieve it. The university expects you to comply with its regulations on academic honesty. Please ensure that you are familiar with these regulations and guidelines.

6. Assignments and online submission
All assignments will have an electronic submission component via Moodle’s Turnitin.com module. Please do not e-mail assignments to Humanities staff: they will not be accepted. The outline and research project will require hard copies. Paper submissions may be handed into me in class. Please note: you will be assigned a late penalty if your electronic submission is late. If the submissions are not absolutely identical, you may be asked to review your work with me. Students in this course may choose to opt-out of using Turnitin.com for any reason. If you opt out, you may be given alternative online submission instructions, and will be asked to attend a meeting to review your work in person.

7. Grades, assignments, and lateness
The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9--point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York (e.g., A+ = 9, A = 8, B+ = 7, C+ = 5, etc.). Assignments and tests* will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding number grade (e.g. A+ = 90 to 100, A = 80 to 90, B+ = 75 to 79, etc.). For a full description of York grading system see the Undergraduate Calendar: http://calendars.registrar.yorku.ca/2014-2015/academic/grades/index.htm

8. Late penalties
Academic performance depends on students doing their work not only well, but on time. Assignments received later than the due date will be penalized by 5%, or one letter grade each day they are late (e.g. an 80%/A would become 75%/B+). The course director will consider exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness and on other compassionate grounds, only when supported by written documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note).
9. Missed classes and assignments
Students with a documented reason for missing classes, course assignments or presentations, may request accommodation from me. Further extensions or accommodation will require students to submit a formal petition to the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies.

10. Accessibility Support
If you are a student with a disability or accessibility challenge, there are a variety of services to support your academic work. Contact Disability Services at http://ds.info.yorku.ca/ to get more information. We will work together as required to make the course and materials more accessible to you. This process is confidential.

Counselling Services: http://pcs.info.yorku.ca/ also provides a number of services to York students.

11. University Policies and Deadlines
All students should familiarize themselves with the following information and policies http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/index-policies.html (Click on ‘Faculty, Staff, Students: Conduct and Responsibilities)

- Senate Policy on Academic Honesty
- Ethics Review Process for research involving human participants
- Course requirement accommodation for students with disabilities, including physical, medical, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities
- Student Conduct Standards
- Religious Observance Accommodation

Thematic Outline:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1:</th>
<th>Introduction: course objectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept 8</td>
<td>The religious and the popular</td>
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<td>Week 2:</td>
<td>Religion and Hindi Cinema</td>
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<td>Sept 15th</td>
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<td>Week 3:</td>
<td>Religion on TV</td>
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<td>Sept 22nd</td>
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<td>Week 4:</td>
<td>Revisiting mythic narratives</td>
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<td>Sept 29th</td>
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<td>Week 5:</td>
<td>Sita’s Ramayana (book)</td>
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<td>Oct 6th</td>
<td>Sita Sings the Blues</td>
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Patricia Uberoi – “Unity in Diversity: Dilemmas of Nationhood in Indian Calendar Art”
Jamal Elias – “Truck decorating and Religious Identity”
Rachel Dwyer – “The Religious and the secular in Hindi film”
Faisa Hirji – “Change of pace? Islam and tradition in popular Indian cinema”
Purnima Mankekar – “Television Tales, National Narratives, and a Woman’s Rage: Multiple Interpretations of Draupadi’s Disrobing”
Neluka Silva – “Casting ethnicity: representation of ethnic identities in contemporary Sri Lankan teledrama”
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings and Resources</th>
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| Week 6: Oct 13th | Caste critique in modern cinema | *Fandry*  
*Sharmila Rege* – “Caste and Popular Culture”  
Interview with AS Ajith Kumar [http://roundtableindia.co.in/](http://roundtableindia.co.in/) |
| Week 7: Oct 20th | Pakistan Cinema and religious representation | *Khuda Ke Liye* or *Khamosh Pani* (in class)  
Satarupa Dasgupta – “For the Sake of God: Religion, Militancy, and Identity in Pakistani Cinema” |
| Oct 27th | Fall Reading week |  |
| | Drawing out Gender in Colonial India and Modern Bangladesh | Sumanta Banerjee – “Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal”  
Samia Huq: Piety, music and gender transformation |
| Week 9: Nov 10th | Sikh youth, gender, and diaspora | Ruprai – *Seva* (book)  
Superwoman (selected videos)  
Harjant Gill, *Roots of Love* |
| Week 10: | Yoga, meditation and new age | Prachi Patankar – “Ghosts of Yoga Past and Present”  
[https://southasiasolidarityinitiative.wordpress.com/portfolio/ghosts](https://southasiasolidarityinitiative.wordpress.com/portfolio/ghosts)  
Vijay Prashad – from *Karma of Brown Folk* |
| Week 11: Nov 24th | Religion, youth, and music subcultures | Sunaina Maira – “Henna and Hiphop”  
Dhiraj Murthy – “Muslim Punks Online: A Diasporic Pakistani Music Subculture on the Internet” |
| Week 12: Dec 1st | Final project presentations and end of term party |  |
Senate Policy on Academic Honesty

Approved by Senate: 2005/04/28 (effective September, 2005); Amended by Senate: 2008/06/28; Amended by Senate: 2011/02/17.

Read the Senate policy on Academic Honesty:
http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/academic-honesty-senate-policy-on/

1. Senate Policy on Academic Honesty

The Policy on Academic Honesty is an affirmation and clarification for members of the University of the general obligation to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. As a clear sense of academic honesty and responsibility is fundamental to good scholarship, the policy recognizes the general responsibility of all faculty members to foster acceptable standards of academic conduct and of the student to be mindful of and abide by such standards.

Academic honesty requires that persons do not falsely claim credit for the ideas, writing or other intellectual property of others, either by presenting such works as their own or through impersonation. Similarly, academic honesty requires that persons do not cheat (attempt to gain an improper advantage in an academic evaluation), nor attempt or actually alter, suppress, falsify or fabricate any research data or results, official academic record, application or document. Finally, academic honesty requires that persons do not aid or abet others to commit an offence of academic dishonesty, including intentional acts to disrupt academic activities.

Suspected breaches of academic honesty will be investigated and charges shall be laid if reasonable and probable grounds exist. A student who is charged with a breach of academic honesty shall be presumed innocent until, based upon clear and compelling evidence, a committee determines the student has violated the academic honesty standards of the university. A finding of academic misconduct will lead to the range of penalties described in the guidelines which accompany this policy. In some cases the University regulations on non-academic discipline may apply. A lack of familiarity with the Senate Policy and Guidelines on Academic Honesty on the part of a student does not constitute a defence against their application. Some academic offences constitute offences under the Criminal Code of Canada; a student charged under University regulations may also be subject to criminal charges. Charges may also be laid against York University students for matters which arise at other educational institutions.

2. Senate Guidelines on Academic Honesty

2.1 Summary of Offences Against the Standards of Academic Honesty

The following summary of offences is not exhaustive, nor are the definitions provided for each offence confined to the examples cited.
2.1.1 Cheating is the attempt to gain an improper advantage in an academic evaluation. Forms of cheating include:

- Obtaining a copy of an examination before it is officially available or learning an examination question before it is officially available;
- Copying another person’s answer to an examination question;
- Consulting an unauthorized source during an examination;
- Disruption of an academic evaluation by any means;
- Obtaining assistance by means of documentary, electronic or other aids which are not approved by the instructor;
- Changing a score or a record of an examination result;
- Submitting the work one has done for one class or project to a second class, or as a second project, without the prior informed consent of the relevant instructors;
- Submitting work prepared in collaboration with another or other member(s) of a class when collaborative work on a project has not been authorized by the instructor;
- Submitting work prepared in whole or in part by another person and representing that work as one’s own;
- Offering for sale essays or other assignments, in whole or in part, with the expectation that these works will be submitted by a student for appraisal;
- Preparing work in whole or in part, with the expectation that this work will be submitted by a student for appraisal.

2.1.2 Impersonation is to have someone impersonate one’s self in class, in a test, examination or interview, or in connection with any other type of assignment or placement associated with a course or academic program. Both the impersonator and the individual impersonated may be charged.

2.1.3 Plagiarism is the misappropriation of the work of another by representing another person’s ideas, writing or other intellectual property as one’s own. This includes the presentation of all or part of another person’s work as something one has written, paraphrasing another’s writing without proper acknowledgement, or representing another’s artistic or technical work or creation as one’s own. Any use of the work of others, whether published, unpublished or posted electronically, attributed or anonymous, must include proper acknowledgement.

2.1.4 Improper research practices. Academic research includes the collection, analysis, interpretation and publication of information or data obtained in the scientific laboratory or in the field. Forms of improper research practices include:

- Dishonest reporting of investigative results, either through fabrication or falsification;
- Taking or using the research results of others without permission or due acknowledgement
- Misrepresentation or selective reporting of research results or the methods used.

2.1.5 Dishonesty in publication. It is a violation of academic honesty to knowingly publish information that will mislead or deceive readers. This includes the falsification or fabrication of data or information, as well as the failure to give credit to collaborators as joint authors or the listing as authors of others who have not contributed to the work. Plagiarism is also considered a form of dishonesty in publication.

2.1.6 Dissemination of information without permission. Information or experimental data that was collected with a member of faculty or another student, and other works that involved the participation of a faculty member or another student, should not be submitted for publication or otherwise disseminated without their permission.

2.1.7 Abuse of confidentiality. Taking or releasing the ideas or data of others that were given with the expectation that they are confidential is inappropriate. This includes the ideas or data obtained via the evaluation of confidential grant proposals, award applications or manuscripts that will be or may have been submitted for possible funding or publication. Unless one is authorized to do so, it is improper to obtain a password assigned to another or to copy or modify a data file or program belonging to someone else. Proper authorization means being granted permission either by the owner or originator of that material, or by an appropriate faculty member or administrator.

2.1.8 Falsification or unauthorized modification of an academic document/record. It is a breach of academic honesty to falsify, fabricate or in any way modify, either through omission or commission, an application to the University or a program, course student examination or test, transcript, grade, letter of recommendation or related document, a degree, a physician’s letter/form or any other document used in support of an academic application, record, petition/appeal or endeavor.

2.1.9 Obstruction of the academic activities of another. It is a violation of academic honesty to interfere with the scholarly activities of another in order to harass or gain unfair academic advantage. This includes interference or tampering with experimental data, with a human or animal subject, with a written or other creation (e.g., a painting, sculpture or film), with a chemical used for scientific study, or with any other object of study.

2.1.10 Encouraging, enabling or causing others to do or attempt any of the above with intent to mislead an instructor, academic unit, program, office or committee as to a student’s academic status, qualifications, actions or preparation, or knowingly aiding or abetting anyone in a breach of academic honesty shall itself be considered misconduct. Taking any action which can reasonably be interpreted as intending to encourage or enable others to commit an offence of academic honesty.

2.2 Summary of Penalties for Academic Misconduct
When verified, violations of academic honesty may lead to the following range of penalties, which may be imposed singularly or in combination for any offence. The following penalties are listed in ascending order of severity.

2.2.1 Written disciplinary warning or reprimand.

2.2.2 Required completion of an academic honesty assignment.

2.2.3 Make-up assignment, examination or rewriting a work, subject to a lowered grade.

2.2.4 Lower grade on the assignment, examination or work.

2.2.5 Lower grade in the course.

2.2.6 Failure in the course.

2.2.7 Permanent grade of record. The grade assigned shall remain as the one grade of record for the course, even if the course is repeated. This penalty can be added to any other penalty, but shall always be attached to the penalty of failure in the course.

2.2.8 Notation on transcript. Notation on transcript can be a separate penalty or it can be added to any other penalty. Transcript notation shall always be included in cases of suspension, withholding or rescinding a York degree, diploma or certificate and expulsion from the University. Transcript notation can be for a limited period, at the end of which the notation will be removed from the student’s transcript. When no period is specified for a transcript notation, a student may petition to the Faculty Petitions Committee to have the notation removed after a period of five years from the date at which the notation was entered, with the exception of notation of expulsion from the University.

2.2.9 Suspension from the University for a definite period, not to exceed 5 years, with transcript notation. Suspension is defined as a penalty of a variable but limited period during which the student may not register in the University, imposed for serious academic offences such as plagiarism and cheating. A student who is otherwise eligible to graduate, but is suspended, may not graduate until the suspension expires or is lifted. This penalty may be awarded only by a Faculty-level committee which is recognized by a Faculty Council as the responsible body to assign this penalty.

2.2.10 Expulsion from the University with transcript notation. Expulsion is defined as permanently terminating a person’s right to continue as a student in the University and to be re-admitted as a student in the University. This penalty is to be imposed for extreme forms and/or multiple incidents of academic dishonesty. Expulsion
from the University may be awarded only by a Faculty-level committee which is recognized by a Faculty Council as the responsible body to assign this penalty.

2.2.11 Withholding or rescinding a York degree, diploma or certificate with transcript notation. When a Faculty decides to rescind a degree, diploma or certificate, the decision, with supporting documentation, must be forwarded to the Senate Appeals Committee for approval on behalf of Senate.

2.2.12 The following penalty is applicable only to students in the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Retroactive withdrawal of a graduate student from a course with a transcript notation of the reason for the withdrawal.