

**English 587/Comparative Studies 543**  
“South Asian American Literature and Culture”  
MW 1:30-3:18, Denney Hall 250  
Autumn 2008

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**Dr. Pranav Jani**

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567 Denney Hall, [jani.4@osu.edu](mailto:jani.4@osu.edu)  
Hours: M 3:30-5:30 and W 3:30-4:30  
<http://people.cohums.ohio-state.edu/jani4/>

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**Course Description**

This course investigates literature, film and nonfictional texts by and about South Asian Americans, paying special attention to the politics of identity formation. What notions of religion, gender, nation, class, and sexuality govern these identities? Where have South Asian Americans fit in terms of the racial and ethnic dynamics of American society? How have ideas about the “exotic” or “spiritual” East and the “materialist” West shaped the image (and self-image) of this group? Throughout, our aim will be to see the historical contexts within which these questions have changed – especially since greater immigration from Asia was allowed in 1965. We will specifically discuss how cultural identities have been shaped recently by corporate globalization and the global popularity of everything “Indian,” from Bollywood, bhangra, and mehndi to writers and software engineers. By drawing on literary, cinematic, historical and ethnographic texts, this course seeks to provide students with an interdisciplinary framework for understanding the diverse and often conflicting ways through which the desi experience is portrayed and understood.

**Required Texts (available at SBX, 1806 N High St)**

Chitra Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*  
Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*  
Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*  
Shamita Dasgupta, ed., *A Patchwork Shawl*  
Vijay Prashad, *Karma of Brown Folk*

**Course Web Page(s) and Email:**

Log on at [www.carmen.osu.edu](http://www.carmen.osu.edu) for

- Interactive Syllabus and Assignments
- Online articles
- Dropbox for submitting papers
- Discussion threads for journal entries

Go to my personal webpage (<http://people.cohums.ohio-state.edu/jani4/>) or blog ([www.pranavjani.blogspot.com](http://www.pranavjani.blogspot.com)).

- links to the broader literary and political context of class material
- links to world and alternative media
- my posts on politics and culture

**Note:** Messages requiring a response from me should be sent to [jani.4@osu.edu](mailto:jani.4@osu.edu). Please keep the discussion on Carmen focused on themes and questions of general interest to the class.

## Course Requirements

Class Participation	20%
Carmen (10 entries)	10%
Short Paper (2-3 pages)	15%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Project	30%

## Grading

- **Class Participation:** Engaged, active participation in the class will be crucial to your grade. This includes, but is not limited to: arriving to class on time, bringing in the texts we're reading that day, being alert during lecture and discussion, raising questions and comments in the discussion period. Multiple absences, as described below, can detract from your participation grade.
- **Carmen:** To receive the full 10% of the grade, you must post at least 10, paragraph-length entries to the discussion threads on Carmen by the end of the term. These should consist of either close readings of texts or elaborations, with some textual support, of themes and discussions raised in class. At least 5 of these should initiate discussion of a topic; the rest can also respond to others' posts. Balancing original comments and responses, of course, will help develop online interaction.
- **Short Paper:** The short paper will focus on your ability to closely analyze a particular text from the syllabus. It should **not** be a mere summary of the text or the ideas contained within it but an analysis of how the text works. The specific assignment will be made available through Carmen.
- **Midterm Exam:** The midterm will be a take-home exam, featuring a series of essay questions that measure your reading comprehension and your grasp of the main themes and theoretical paradigms of the course.
- **Final Project:** The specific assignment will be posted on Carmen at the start of the term. In general, the project will allow you to go beyond the syllabus in producing an in-depth study of a particular question or theme from the course. Students might conduct surveys and interviews, make digital videos, create sites and blogs, etc., in order to fulfill this assignment. Groupwork is encouraged.

## Course Policies

- 1) Absences: More than 2 absences from class will harm your participation grade, with a loss of 1/3 of a grade for each day lost. Emergencies should be reported to me as soon as possible, and may require documentation from the University.
- 2) Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. **There will be no exceptions to this rule. If you are stressed out and don't know how to write the paper, communicate with me *before* deciding to plagiarize, not after.**
- 3) Help with Disabilities: Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should meet with me, as early in the quarter as possible, to discuss your specific needs. Early communication will allow me to adjust the course according to your needs in terms of access to technology, course material, and office hours. If it makes sense, we can coordinate a plan with the Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, which offers services for students with documented disabilities. To contact the ODS, call 292-3307.
- 4) Use of Technology: I expect your papers to be typed in 12-point font and double-spaced, and that you submit them to me as a Microsoft Word document via the Carmen dropbox. I also expect that you can be reached at your OSU email account for announcements that I may need to make in between class sessions. While I will make every effort to make the technology accessible, **it is your responsibility to get papers to me on time in the proper format.** This includes, but is not limited to, planning ahead so that you can account for technological problems that may occur in saving your document, transferring it to Carmen, etc.

The logic behind my requirements is this: (1) 12-point font and double spacing makes the document most legible for grading and reading, (2) Microsoft Word—available to you at all campus computers—is the easiest format for uploading and downloading, and (3) posting papers electronically on Carmen allows me to give you comments that are typed, legible, and much more thorough than if you were printing them out and handing them in.

## COURSE OUTLINE

W 9.24 Introduction

### Weeks 1-3: Myths of the East and the West

- M 9.29 Prashad, "Of India," *Karma of Brown Folk* (1-10)  
Prashad, "Of the Mysterious East," *Karma of Brown Folk* (11-20)  
Prashad, "Of the Oriental Menagerie," *Karma of Brown Folk* (21-46)
- W 10.1 Film: American Desi (2001, director: Piyush Dinker Pandya)  
Doshi, "Divided Consciousness Amidst a New Orientalism" *Contours of the Heart*, (201-14, Carmen)
- M 10.6 Film: Mississippi Masala (1991, director: Mira Nair)
- W 10.8 Maira and Srikanth, "Visualizing Three Continents," *Contours of the Heart* (125-40, Carmen)  
Mani, "Moments of Identity in Film," *Contours of the Heart* (175-88, Carmen)
- M 10.13 Lahiri, "Sexy," *Interpreter of Maladies* (83-110)  
Lahiri, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," *Interpreter of Maladies* (23-42)
- W 10.15 Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies," *Interpreter of Maladies* (43-70)  
Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," *Interpreter of Maladies* (111-35)

### Weeks 4-5: Race and Ethnicity in South Asian America

- M 10.20 Prashad, "Of the Origin of Desis and Some Principles of State Selection," *Karma of Brown Folk* (69-83)  
Shankar and Balgopal, "South Asian immigrants before the 1950s: The formation of ethnic, symbolic, and group identity." (Carmen)  
\*United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923) (Carmen)  
\*Asian Exclusion Act (1924) (Carmen)  
\*Echos of freedom: South Asian pioneers in California 1899-1965 available online: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/echoes/echoes.html>
- W 10.22 Lahiri, "The Third and Final Continent," *Interpreter of Maladies* (173-98)  
Prashad, "Of a *Girmit* Consciousness," *Karma of Brown Folk* (85-107)
- M 10.27 Maira, "Henna and Hip-hop" (Carmen)  
Sharma, "Rotten Coconuts" (Carmen)  
Review (links on Carmen):  
- Karmarcy, "Blood Brothers" (music video)  
- Panjabi MC and Jay Z, "Beware of the Boys" (video and lyrics)
- W 10.29 Film: *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle* (2004, director: Danny Leiner)  
**Please view film before class**
- Su 11.2 **MIDTERM EXAMS DUE: Carmen as Ms Word document, by 5pm**

### Week 6: 9/11 and South Asian Americans

- M 11.3 Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*  
 W 11.5 Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*  
 Kaur, "Turbans and terror: Racism after September 11" and "Another Sikh man shot in Arizona." <http://911prejudice.stanford.edu/editorial.htm> (Carmen)

### Weeks 7-8: Gender and Sexuality

- M 11.10 From *A Patchwork Shawl*:  
 • Dasgupta, "Introduction" (1-20)  
 • Poore, "The Language of Identity" (21-32)  
 • Hasnat, "Being 'Amreekan: Fried Chicken Versus Chicken Tikka" (33-46)  
 • Chaudhry, "'We Are Graceful Swans Who Can Also Be Crows': Hybrid Identities of Pakistani Muslim Women" (46-61)
- W 11.12 Lahiri, "A Temporary Matter," *Interpreter of Maladies* (1-22)  
 From *A Patchwork Shawl*:  
 • Roy, "Mothers and Daughters in Indian American Families: A Failed Communication?" (97-110)  
 • Dasgupta and Dasgupta, "Sex, Lies, and Women's Lives: An Intergenerational Dialogue" (111-128)  
 • Mazmudar, "Marital Rape: Some Ethical and Cultural Considerations" (129-144)  
 • Krishnan, et al. "Lifting the Veil of Secrecy: Domestic Violence Against South Asian Women in the United States" (145-59)
- M 11.17 Film: *Chutney Popcorn* (1999, director: Nisha Ganatra)  
 W 11.19 From *Patchwork Shawl*:  
 • Khan, "Sexual Exiles" (62-71)  
 • Islam, "Naming Desire, Shaping Identity: Tracing the Experience of Indian Lesbians in the United States" (72-90)  
 Kukke and Shah, "Reflections on queer South Asian progressive activism in the U.S." (Carmen)

### Weeks 9-10: When India is in Vogue

- M 11.24 Film: *The Namesake* (2006, director: Mira Nair)  
 W 11.26 Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*
- M 12.1 Divakaruni, *the Mistress of Spices*  
 W 12.3 Davis, preface to *What's This India Business?*
- T 12.9 **FINAL PROJECTS DUE, posted on Carmen by 2pm**