

Comparative Studies 345: South-Asian American Culture and Religion

TR 9:30-11:18

Fall Quarter 2005

Dr. Pranav Jani

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Course Description

This course investigates the politics of cultural identity and community formation among South Asians in the US. 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)

Dasgupta, Shamita. *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of South Asian Women in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998.

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Mistress of Spices*. New York: Anchor Books, 1998.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Interpreter of Maladies*. Boston: Mariner Books, 1999.

Prashad, Vijay. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Recommended (available at SBX)

Maira, Sunaina and Rajini Srikanth, eds. *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America*. New York: Asian American Writers' Workshop, 1996.

Purkayastha, Bandana. *Negotiating Ethnicity*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

Tweed, Thomas A., ed. *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Course Web Page(s) and Email:

Log on at www.carmen.osu.edu for

- Interactive Syllabus
- Articles marked "C" on the syllabus

- Dropbox for turning in papers
- Discussion threads

Go to my personal webpage: <http://people.cohums.ohio-state.edu/jani4/> for

- links to the broader literary and political context of class material
- links to world and alternative media
- information about campus news and events

Note: Important and personal messages requiring a response from me should be sent to jani.4@osu.edu. Please keep the discussion on Carmen focused on themes and questions of general interest to the class.

Course Requirements

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|-------------------------|-----|
| Participation | 20% |
| Journal (10 entries) | 10% |
| Paper #1 (3-4 pages) | 20% |
| Paper #2 (5-6 pages) | 20% |
| Research Project (8-10) | 30% |

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.
- 3) **Help with Disabilities:** Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. We will coordinate something with the Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, which offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 2-3307.

COURSE OUTLINE

Introduction: Desi Identity in America

- R 9/22 Quiz: Geography, history, and perceptions of South Asians and desis.
 TV: "Homer and Apu." *The Simpsons: Season Five* (1993, artist: Matt Groening)
 Comics: *Badmash: The Weekly South Asian Comic Strip*. <http://www.badmash.org/>
 Website: Sepia Mutiny on Hyphenated Identities:
<http://www.sepiamutiny.com/sepia/archives/001994.html>
 Poem: Vasudeva, Amita. "Can You Talk Mexican?" *Our Feet Walk the Sky*

Media: New York Times, "Questions, Bitterness, and Exile for Queens Girl in Terror Case." June 17, 2005. (Section A, Column 2, page 1) -- handout

Weeks 1-3: East/West and Beyond

- T 9/27 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)
Harjatwala, "Colonization," *Our Feet Walk the Sky* (122) – (handout)
Lahiri, "Sexy," *Interpreter of Maladies* (83-110)
Maira, "Lahore in the Sky," *Contours of the Heart* (253-9) – C
- R 9/29 Film: *American Desi* (2001, director: Piyush Dinker Pandya)
Doshi, *Contours of the Heart*, "Divided Consciousness Amidst a New Orientalism" (201-14) – C
- T 10/4 Film: *Mississippi Masala* (1991, director: Mira Nair)
- R 10/6 Maira and Srikanth, "Visualizing Three Continents," *Contours of the Heart* (125-40) – C
Mani, "Moments of Identity in Film," *Contours of the Heart* (175-88) – C
- T 10/11 Lahiri, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," *Interpreter of Maladies* (23-42)
Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies," *Interpreter of Maladies* (43-70)
- R 10/13 Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," *Interpreter of Maladies* (111-35)
Cooper, "Under the Gravity of Some Thirty Odd Years," *Contours of the Heart* (310-13) – C

Weeks 4-5: Race/Ethnicity

- T 10/18 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." *Amerasia* 27(1). -- C
From *Asian Religions in America* -- C
- United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923)
 - Asian Exclusion Act (1924)
- *Echos of freedom: South Asian pioneers in California 1899-1965 available online:
<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/echoes/echoes.html>
- R 10/20 Film: *Desi: South Asians in New York* (2001, director: Shebana Coelho)
Islam, "Signs of Belonging," *Contours of the Heart* (85-90) -- C
Lahiri, "The Third and Final Continent," *Interpreter of Maladies* (173-98)
Prashad, "Of a Girit Consciousness," *Karma of Brown Folk* (85-107)
- T 10/25 Film: *Taxi-vala* (1994, director: Vivek Bald)
Kaur, "Turbans and terror: Racism after September 11" and "Another Sikh man shot in Arizona." <http://911prejudice.stanford.edu/editorial.htm>
Prashad and Mathew, "Satyagraha in America: The political culture of South Asians in the U.S." *Amerasia*. 25:3. -- C
- R 10/27 Music Video: *Blood Brothers* (Artist: Karmacy) -- C

Music: "Beware of the Boys" (Artist: Panjabi MC and Jay-Z) -- C
 Prashad, "Of Authentic Cultural Lives," *Karma of Brown Folk* (109-32)
 Sharma, "Rotten coconuts and other strange fruits: A slice of hip hop from the west coast." *SAMAR*. Fall/Winter:
<http://www.samarmagazine.org/archive/article.php?id=62>
 Maira. "To Be Young, Brown, and Hip: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Indian American Youth Culture," *Desis in the House*, (29-82) – C
 *Prashad, "Of Antiracist Racism," *Karma of Brown Folk* (157-84)

Week 6: Diasporic Religions

- T 11/1 From *The South Asian Religious Diaspora* - C
- Williams, "Introduction: South Asian Religions in the US" (213-17)
 - Eck, "Negotiating Hindu Identities in the US" (219-37)
 - Haddad, "At Home in the Hijra" (239-58)
 - Mann, "Sikhism in the United States of America" (259-76)
- A Sikh Teenager, "Things That Make You Ask 'Kion?'" *Asian Religions in America* (312-4) – C
- R 11/3 Prashad, "Of Sly Babas and Other Gurus," *Karma of Brown Folk* (46-68)
 Meer, "I Want to Give You Devotion," *Contours of the Heart* (92-106) – C
 Kureishi, "My Son the Fanatic," *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures* – C
 *Prashad, "Of Yankee Hindutva" *Karma of Brown Folk* (133-56)

Week 7-8: Gender, Sexuality, Family

- T 11/8 Comedy: "Marriage" (Artist: Yesha Naik)
Desi Sites: see lists on my website
 From *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)
- *Leonard, K.I. (1999). The management of desire: Sexuality and marriage for young South Asian women in America. In Gupta (ed) *Emerging Voices: South Asian American Women Redefine Self, Family, and Community* -- C
- R 11/10 Film: *Knowing Her Place* (1990, director: Indu Krishnan)
 Mani, L. "Gender, class, and cultural conflict: Indu Krishnan's 'Knowing Her Place,'" *Our feet walk the sky: Women of the South Asian Diaspora* -- C
 Lahiri, "A Temporary Matter," *Interpreter of Maladies* (1-22)
 From *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)

T 11/15 Film: *Chutney Popcorn* (1999, director: Nisha Ganatra)

R 11/17 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."
Amerasia Journal 25(3). – C

Weeks 9-10: Reclaiming the Exotic?

T 11/21 Divakaruni, *Mistress of Spices* (1-97)

R 11/23 NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

T 11/28 Divakaruni, *Mistress of Spices* (101-274)

R 11/30 Divakaruni, *Mistress of Spices* (277-338)

Final Project Due: Tuesday, December 6