ARHA 290: Mahabharata and Ramayana: The Sanskrit Epics and Indian Visual Culture
Instructor: P. Wagoner

Meets Wed., Friday 1:10 to 2:30 PM
Davison Art Center room 300
office: Davison Art Center room 301
phone: x3779  pwagoner@wesleyan.edu
office hours: most days and times possible by prior appointment

I. Introduction to the Two Epics

1/21 Fri: What is epic? problems, themes, approaches

1/26 Wed: Situating the epics: chronology (epic and historical), geography, society, language

1/28 Fri: DISCUSSION: The Great Story of the Bharata War: plot, characters, themes, narrators
READ: Mahābhārata, abridged translation by Chakravarti V. Narasimhan (entire book)

2/2 Wed: Creation or Evolution? The enigma of the Mahābhārata’s production
READ: excerpts from J.A.B. van Buiten, tr. The Mahābhārata: The Book of the Beginning (Moodle)

2/4 Fri: DISCUSSION: The Story of Rama: plot, characters, themes, narrators
READ: Rāma the Steadfast, translated by John Brockington and Mary Brockington (entire book, including “Introduction” and “Afterthoughts”)
Barbara S. Miller, “The Universe of Rama: Valmiki’s Epic Poem”, in Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions, p. 15-26 (Moodle)

*2/9 Wed: DISCUSSION: The MBh and Ram. as “Indian epics” – similarities and differences
READ: John D. Smith, “Old Indian: The Two Sanskrit Epics” (Moodle)
* ESSAY # 1 Assigned: Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa compared

II. Fixing the Epic Texts: From Orality to Literacy

2/11 Fri: Oral-formulaic composition and performance
READ: Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word, chapters 1,2,3
Johnson, tr. The Sauptikaparvan of the Mahābhārata (especially ch. 8)

2/16 Wed: Orality and Literacy; Epic and “meta-epic”; from oral to written
READ: Ong, Orality and Literacy, chapters 4 & 6;
Vyasa and Ganesa, from the Mahābhārata (Adiparvan, chapter 1) (Moodle)
Valmiki, Kusa, and Lava, from Rāmāyaṇa, Bāla Kāṇḍa, sargas 1-4) (Moodle)

*2/18 Fri: The birth of poetry (kāvya): The Rāmāyaṇa as “First Poem” (ādi-kāvya)
*ESSAY #1 DUE: Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa compared  (by 5:00 pm)
Introduction to 'Drṣṭya-kāvyā' of Classical Sanskrit Theater

2/23 Wed: Introductory considerations: Rāmīlā as darśana and as “visual commentary”
READ: Diana Eck, *Darsān: Seeing the Divine Image in India*
Linda Hess, “The Ram Legend as Theatre: Rāmīlā at Benaras”, in *The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions*, pp. 139-151. (Moodle)
Philip Lutgendorf, “Words Made Flesh: the Banaras Rāmīlā as Epic Commentary” (Moodle)

2/25 Fri: The rasa aesthetics of classical Sanskrit theater;
DISCUSSION: From the MBh.’s Śakuntalopākhyaṇam to Kalidasā’s Abhijñāna-śākuntala
READ: A.K. Ramanujan and Edwin Gerow, “Indian Poetics”, ch. 3 of *The Literatures of India, an Introduction*, ed. Edward C. Dimock et al., pp. 115-143. (Moodle)
Mahābhārata, Śakuntalopākhyaṇam (Moodle)
Somadeva Vasudeva, translator, *The Recognition of Shakuntala by Kalidasa*

*3/2 Wed: DISCUSSION: Visuality and the development of rasa in Bhavabhūti’s Uttara-rāma-carita
READ: Sheldon Pollock, translator, *Rama’s Last Act by Bhavabhuti*
** Take-home Midterm exam distributed

IV. Epic and Architecture: The Ramayana at Vijayanagara

*3/4 Fri: Vijayanagara, “City of Victory”; Toponym Transfer and the Epic Landscape
READ: Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot, “Southern India in the Age of Vijayanagara, 1350-1550”, in *India Before Europe* (Moodle)
Anila Vergheese, “The Ramayana Tradition”, ch. 4 of *Religious Traditions at Vijayanagara as Revealed through its Monuments* (Moodle)
**Midterm exam due at start of class

READ: George Michell, “The Temple as a Link between the Gods and Man”, in *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to its Meaning and Forms* (Moodle)

3/25 Fri: The Ramayana Reliefs of the Ramachandra Temple
READ: Anna Dallapiccola, “The City of Vijayanagara: Kishkindha, the Monkey-Kingdom”, *The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions*, pp. 61-72. (Moodle)
Anna Dallapiccola et al., *The Ramachandra Temple at Vijayanagara*, sections 19-22, pp. 81-98 (Moodle)

3/30 Wed: DISCUSSION: The Ramachandra Temple and Political Legitimation
READ: John M. Fritz, “Vijayanagara: Authority and Meaning of a South Indian Imperial Capital” (Moodle)
Anna Dallapiccola et al., *The Ramachandra Temple at Vijayanagara*, sections 1-8, pp. 3-23 (Moodle)
Sheldon Pollock, “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India” (Moodle)
V. Illustrating the Epics: Rajput and Mughal Manuscripts of the Ramayana

4/1 Fri: Maharaja Jagat Singh of Mewar and his great Rāmāyaṇa manuscript (1649-1653): iconography and narrative technique

*4/6 Wed: A brief history of manuscript illustration in India, 15th–17th Centuries: Format, Style, and Modes of Illustration
*ESSAY #2 Assigned: “The Vindication of Sita” and Rajput-Mughal Politics

4/8 Fri: Jagat Singh’s Rāmāyaṇa ms. and its relationship to Mughal mss. of the Rāmāyaṇa
READ: Asok Kumar Das, “Akbar’s Imperial Ramayana: A Mughal Persian Manuscript”, The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions, pp. 73-84 (Moodle)

4/13 Wed: Jagat Singh’s Rāmāyaṇa: Valmiki and Rajput Political Ideology
READ: J.P.Losty, The Ramayana: Love and Valour in India’s Great Epic

4/15 Fri: Jagat Singh’s Rāmāyaṇa, cont’d

VI. The Epics at the Movies

*4/20 Wed: From Parsi Theater to Indian Cinema;
The “Mythological” Film, I: Babubhai Mistry’s Mahābhārata (1965)
SEE: Babubhai Mistry (Director), Mahābhārata (Hindi with English subtitles), 1965. DVD. New York, Baba Traders. (Art Reserve)
*ESSAY #2 DUE: “The Vindication of Sita” and Rajput-Mughal Politics (by 5:00 pm)

Telugu vernacular cinema and politics
SEE: Kamalakara Kameshwara Rao (Director), Nartanaśāla (Telugu with English subtitles), 1963. DVD. San Jose, KAD Entertainment USA. (Art Reserve)

SEE: Shyam Benegal (Director), Kalyug (Hindi with English subtitles), 1980. DVD. Secaucus NJ, Eros Entertainment Inc. (Art Reserve)

SEE: Prakash Jha (Director), Raajneeti (Hindi with English subtitles), 2010. Marina Del Ray CA, UTV Communications. (Art Reserve)

5/4 Wed: An outside take on the Rāmāyaṇa: Nina Paley’s Sita Sings the Blues, 2008
SEE: Nina Paley (Director), Sita Sings the Blues, 2008 (view online at: http://www.sitasingstheblues.com/watch.html)

*5/13 Friday: Final exam (9:00 AM – 12:00 noon)
ABOUT THE COURSE:

1. **Readings**: Reading assignments are indicated under the lecture or discussion topic for which they are assigned, and should be read BEFORE the class meeting on that day.

The following eight books are available for purchase at Broad Street Books:


A ninth book is available, but is optional (a fuller, but still abridged, translation of the Mahabharata):


Additional essays, articles, and excerpts from books are also part of the assigned reading. These are all available as PDFs on Moodle.

One copy of each of the assigned textbooks is available on reserve in the ART LIBRARY (not at Olin). In addition to the required readings, the reserve desk also has a number of other useful reference sources and optional additional readings. Available volumes of the full unabridged translations of the two epics (the van Buitenen *Mahābhārata* and the Goldman et al. Rāmāyana—neither project has yet been fully completed) can also be found at the reserve desk. Full bibliographic details for all readings are provided in the “List of Reserve Readings” appended to this syllabus.

Finally, four of the five films which we will be considering in the last unit of the course are available in the form of DVDs at the Reserve Desk in the Art Library:

- Babubhai Mistry (Director), *Mahābhārat* (Hindi with English subtitles), 1965. DVD. New York, Baba Traders. PN1997 .M34 1990z

The fifth film is available on-line at: [http://www.sitasingstheblues.com/watch.html](http://www.sitasingstheblues.com/watch.html)

- Nina Paley (Director/Animator), *Sita Sings the Blues* (English), 2008.

2. **Graded assignments**: There are four graded assignments for the course: two short essays, a take-home midterm, and a final. Both essays are on prescribed topics and are to be no more than five pages in length. Please note that all written work submitted is to be printed in a 12 pt. font, double-spaced, with 1-inch
margins, and with page numbers. Work that does not adhere to these guidelines will be returned graded but with no comments or suggestions.

Both papers are to be handed in by 5:00 pm on the date they are due. The topics and due dates for the essays are as follows (fuller details and instructions will be provided at the time of assignment; details may change slightly):

Essay #1: The Mahabharata and Ramayana compared: What are the similarities and differences between the two Sanskrit epics, in terms of plot, character types, and themes? Which strikes you as more significant, the similarities or the differences, and why? DUE: Friday, February 18th (by 5:00pm).

Essay #2: “The Vindication of Sita” and Rajput-Mughal Politics: Write an essay discussing this painting from Jagat Singh’s Ramayana, both as an illustration of the epic text, and as a contemporary “pictorial commentary” on that text. Specifically, how does the scene from the epic relate to the contemporary political reality of Mewar’s relationship with the Mughal empire? DUE: Wednesday, April 20th (by 5:00pm).

The Take-Home Midterm questions will be made available on Moodle on Wednesday, March 2nd, and will consist of a single essay question and several short answer questions (including definitions of key terms). It will focus primarily on the material covered in Units II & III (Fixing the Epic Texts: From Orality to Literacy” and “The Place of the Epics in the ‘Visual Poetry’ of Classical Sanskrit Theater”). The completed exam must be turned in on Friday, March 4th at the start of class.

The Final exam will be given during the regularly scheduled final exam period for this course (Friday, May 13th, 9:00 am -- 12 noon) and will be of the same format as the midterm. It should not require the full 3-hour exam period to complete. It will focus primarily (but not exclusively) on the material covered in Units V & VI (“The Epics in Mughal and Rajput Painting” and “The Mahabharata at the Movies”).

Your grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

Essay 1: 20%
Essay 2: 20%
Midterm: 20%
Final: 20%

20% will be reserved for evaluation of such factors as attendance, contribution to discussions and other class activities, improvement over the course of the semester, etc.
TOTAL: 100%

3) Policy on extensions & rescheduling of exams: There will be no extensions given for any paper, except in the case of a medical or personal emergency supported by a written communication from your class dean. All papers are due by 5:00pm on the due date, and should be placed in my mailbox in the department office (upstairs in the Zilkha Gallery building; inside the glass doors – not the boxes on the table outside) Alternately, papers may be submitted electronically, as an email attachment. IF SUBMITTING ELECTRONICALLY, PLEASE use either PDF or RTF format. If papers are turned in after the due date, your grade will be reduced by one letter grade for each day or fraction of a day that the paper is late.
⇒ There will be no rescheduling of quizzes and exams except in the case of a medical or personal emergency supported by a written communication from your class dean. Otherwise, if you are not present for the exam at the scheduled time, your grade for that exam will be 0 (zero).

4) Honor Code and Plagiarism: Please be sure you have read and understood the section in the current Student Handbook or Wesleyan Catalogue describing the Honor Code and Plagiarism. In particular, pay special attention to the section on plagiarism, which describes the acceptable ways of quoting, paraphrasing, and citing the works of others, and acknowledging the ideas of others. Any suspected violations of the honor code will be reported to the Honor Board.
5) Students with Disabilities: It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible [before the end of add-drop period], so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html.

6) Classroom etiquette:
   - please arrive on time
   - please turn your cell phone off before you come into the classroom
   - please do not get up and leave the room before class is over
   - if you bring food or beverages, please throw your trash away when class is over
Assigned readings available on Moodle


5. Vyasa, Ganesa, and the Writing of the Mahabharata, from the Mahābhārata (Ādiparvan, chapter 1), trans. by K.M. Ganguli.


