I. Introduction to the Two Epics

1/23 Th: What is epic? problems, themes, approaches

1/28 T: Situating the epics: chronology (epic and historical), geography, society, language

1/30 Th: The religious world of the epics: yajña, tapas, and the gods Vishnu and Siva

2/4 T: DISCUSSION: The Great Story of the Bharata War: plot, characters, themes, narrators
READ: Mahābhārata, abridged translation by John D. Smith (entire book)

2/6 Th: Creation or Evolution? The enigma of the Mahābhārata’s production
READ: excerpts from J.A.B. van Buitenen, tr. The Mahābhārata: The Book of the Beginning (Moodle)

2/11 T: Janamejaya’s snake sacrifice: brahmins and kshatriyas; ahimsā and hismā; truth and curses
READ: James W. Earl, Beginning the Mahābhārata: A Reader’s Guide to the Frame Stories (entire book)

2/13 Th: DISCUSSION: The Story of Rama: plot, characters, themes, narrators

*2/18 T: 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

2/20 Th: Oral-formulaic composition and performance
READ: Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word, chapters 1,2, &3
Johnson, tr. The Sautikaparvan of the Mahābhārata (especially ch. 8)
2/25 T: 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 Rāmāyana, Bāla Kāṇḍa, sargas 1-4) (Moodle)

*2/27 Th: The birth of poetry (kāvyā): The Rāmāyana as “First Poem” (ādi-kāvyā)
*ESSAY #1 DUE: Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana compared (by 11:59 pm)

III. The Place of the Epics in the “Visual Poetry” (drṣya-kāvyā)
of Classical Sanskrit Theater

3/4 T: Introductory considerations: Ramlīla as darśana and as “visual commentary”
READ: Diana Eck, Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India
Linda Hess, “The Ram Legend as Theatre: Ramlīla at Benaras”, in The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions, pp. 139-151. (Moodle)
Philip Lutgendorf, “Words Made Flesh: the Banaras Ramlīla as Epic Commentary” (Moodle)

3/6 Th: NO CLASS

3/7 – 3/24: Mid-semester recess

3/25 T: Classical Sanskrit Theater: Performance Dimensions; Kutiyattam—the oldest continuous tradition of theatrical performance
READ: Farley P. Richmond, “Kutiyattam”, in Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance, pp. 87-117 (Moodle)

3/27 Th: The rasa aesthetics of classical Sanskrit theater
DISCUSSION: From the MBh.’s Śakuntalopākhyānam to Kalidas’aśa Abhijñāna-śākuntalā
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, Sakuntalopākhyānam (Moodle)
Somadeva Vasudeva, translator, The Recognition of Shakuntala by Kalidasa

4/1 T: DISCUSSION: Visuality and the development of rasa in Bhavabhūti’s Uttara-rāma-carita
READ: Sheldon Pollock, translator, Rama’s Last Act by Bhavabhutī

*4/3 Th: Medieval transformations of the Classical Sanskrit Theater: Kathakali and Yakshagana dance dramas
** Take-home Midterm exam distributed

⇒ FILM Screening: Mahābhārat (1965) 7:00 - 10:00 (Wyllys 114)
III. Illustrating the Epics:  Rajput and Mughal Manuscripts of the Ramayana

*4/8 T:  Maharaja Jagat Singh of Mewar and his great Rāmāyaṇa manuscript (1649-1653): iconography and narrative technique
   **Midterm exam due at start of class

4/10 Th:  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

⇒  FILM Screening: Nartanasala (1963) 7:00 - 10:00 (Wyllys 114)

4/15 T:  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)

4/17 Th:  Jagat Singh’s Rāmāyaṇa: Valmiki and Rajput Political Ideology
   READ:  J.P. Losty, The Ramayana: Love and Valour in India’s Great Epic

VI. The Epics at the Movies

*4/22 T:  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. 163 minutes. DVD. New York, Baba Traders. (Art Reserve)
   *ESSAY #2 DUE: “The Vindication of Sita” and Rajput-Mughal Politics (by 11:59 pm)

   Telugu vernacular cinema and politics
   SEE:  Kamalakara Kameshwara Rao (Director), Nartanaśāla (Telugu with English subtitles), 1963. approx. 180 minutes. DVD. San Jose, KĀD Entertainment USA. (Art Reserve)

⇒  FILM Screening: Kalyug (1980) 7:00 - 10:00 (Wyllys 114)

   SEE:  Shyam Benegal (Director), Kalyug (Hindi with English subtitles), 1980. 143 minutes. DVD. Secaucus NJ, Eros Entertainment Inc. (Art Reserve)

⇒  FILM Screening: Raajneeti (2010) 7:00 - 10:00 (Wyllys 114)

   SEE:  Prakash Jha (Director), Raajneeti (Hindi with English subtitles), 2010. Marina Del Ray CA, UTV Communications. (Art Reserve)
5/6 T: An outside take on the Rāmāyana: 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)

*5/15 Th: 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:


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. Rāmāyaṇa – 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 .M347 1990z
Kamalakara Kameshwara Rao (Director), Nartanaśāla (Telugu with English subtitles), 1963. DVD. San Jose, KAD Entertainment USA. PN1997 .N375 2000z
Shyam Benegal (Director), Kalyug (Hindi with English subtitles), 1980. DVD. Secaucus NJ, Eros Entertainment Inc. PN1997 .K3562 2000

The fifth film is available on-line at: 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 submitted 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. Papers may be submitted either in hard copy or electronically as an email attachment. If you opt for hard copy, please place your paper in my mailbox in the Art History Program office (41 Wyllys Ave., third floor). Please do not put them in the boxes numbered by course that are next to Esther Moran’s desk; these are where your graded work is returned and may be picked up. If you opt for email submission, please use either DOCX or PDF format.

Both papers are to be handed in by 11:59 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: Thursday, February 27th (by 11:59 pm).

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: Tuesday, April 22nd (by 11:59 pm).

The Take-Home Midterm questions will be made available on Moodle on Thursday, April 3rd, 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 Tuesday, April 8th at the start of class.

The Final exam will be given during the regularly scheduled final exam period for this course (Thursday, May 15th, 9:00 am -- 12 noon) and will be of similar to the midterm in format. 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 (“Illustrating the Epics: Rajput and Mughal Manuscripts of the Ramayana” and “The Epics at the Movies”).

Your grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

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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.

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: Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources (http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/index.html), located in North College, room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

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.

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


The following books and Film DVDs are available on reserve in the Art Library:

**Assigned readings:**


**Unabridged Translations of the Epics:**
   Vol. 1: Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda
   Vol. 2: Aranya Kanda, Kiskindha Kanda, Sundara Kanda
   Vol. 3: Yuddha Kanda, Uttara Kanda

   Vol. 1: Book 1. The Book of the Beginning
   Vol. 2: Book 2. The Book of the Assembly Hall, and Book 3. The Book of the Forest
   (Books 6-10 still under preparation)

Vol. 4: *Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa*, trans. Rosalind Lefebvre
Vol. 5: *Sundara Kāṇḍa*, trans. R.P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman
Vol. 6: *Yuddha Kāṇḍa*, trans.
(Vol.7: *Uttara Kāṇḍa* still in preparation)

**Assigned Films**


[Nina Paley (Director), *Sita Sings the Blues*, 2008. NOT on Reserve; View online at:](http://www.sitasingstheblues.com/watch.html)


**Other works for your reference**

Romila Thapar, *Sakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*  PK3796  S5  T43  1999

