HIS 350L: 54 (#39405) MW 3:30-5 pm ANS 372 (#31635) GAR 3.116

Epics and Heroes of India

Course Description:

This undergraduate seminar focuses on India's epics, including the classical *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Particular emphasis will be placed on understanding the epic characters in relation to the heroic traditions of premodern India, as well as in relation to the religious traditions of both past and present. Although the Sanskrit epics will be treated at greatest length, we will also explore regional-language versions of the classical epics and read an oral folk epic, the *Epic of Pabuji*. In the first ten weeks of the course, the class format will vary between lectures by the instructor and group discussion. During the final five weeks, students will be engaged largely in thinking and writing on a topic of their choice. By the end of the semester student will have become familiar with India's epic traditions, gained greater appreciation of the humanistic value of epic literature worldwide, and improved their ability to express themselves in writing.

This course carries the Global Cultures flag and the Writing flag.

Instructor Contact Information:

Office Hours Wednesdays 1:30-3:30 pm & by appointment

Office GAR 3.106; tel. 475-9303 E-Mail Address ctalbot@austin.utexas.edu

Requirements and Grading:

During the first ten weeks of the semester, students will be required to submit <u>five</u> reading responses (500 words apiece) relating to the class readings. Students will expand on two of these responses in order to produce <u>two short essay papers</u> (1500 words apiece), in both draft and final forms. Additional reading will be necessary to write the <u>long essay paper</u> (3000 words), also to be submitted in draft and final forms. This paper can either be an expansion of an earlier essay or take up a different topic, with the instructor's approval and guidance. Each student will make an <u>oral presentation</u> to the class, reporting on his/her long essay project. Students will also be required to participate in <u>peer critiques</u> of the essays of their classmates. Class <u>attendance and participation</u> in discussion and class activities will also be assessed

Various aspects of student performance will be weighted as listed below in determining the final grade for the course:

5 reading responses	25%
2 short essay papers (2 drafts each)	30%
long essay paper (2 drafts & proposal)	30%
oral presentation of long essay project	5%
attendance & participation	20%

Please note that pluses and minuses to the final letter grade will be applied in this course.

Required Texts (can be purchased at the Coop or borrowed from PCL reserves):

- 1) Chakravarthi V. Narasimhan, *The Mahabharata* (Columbia University. Press, 1997)
- 2) Gurcharan Das, *The Difficulty of Being Good* (Oxford University Press, 2010)
- 3) R. K. Narayan, *The Ramayana* (Penguin Classics, 2006)
- 4) John D. Smith, *The Epic of Pabuji* (Katha, 2005)

Additional Required Readings (articles & book sections posted on course Blackboard site):

- The Robbing of the Earrings," in *The Mahabharata* vol. 2, trans. by J. A. B. van Buitenen (University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 779-95.
- A. K. Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Ramayanas," in *Many Ramayanas*, ed. Paula Richman (University of California Press, 1991), pp. 22-49.
- selection from The Forest Book of the Ramayana of Kampan, trans. George L.
 Hart and Hank Heifetz (University of California Press, 1989).
- selection from The Ramayana of Valmiki, Vol. 3: Aranyakandha, trans. Sheldon Pollock (Princeton University Press, 1991)
- Velcheru Narayana Rao, "When Does Sita Cease to Be Sita?," in *The Ramayana Revisited*, ed. Mandakranta Bose (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 219-41.
- Richard H. Davis, "The Iconography of Rama's Chariot," in *Contesting the Nation*, ed. David Ludden (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 27-54.
- Purnima Mankekar, "Mediating Modernities," in *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics* (Duke Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 165-223.
- Vinay Dharwadkar, "Censoring the Ramayana," PMLA (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America) 127.3 (May 20, 2012): 433-50.
- William Dalrymple, "Homer in India," *The New Yorker*, Nov. 20, 2006, pp. 48-55.

Course Policies:

- -- <u>Religious holy days</u> sometimes conflict with class schedules. It is the policy of UT-Austin that you must notify each of your instructors at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates you will be absent to observe a religious holy day.
- -- Because this course is a seminar, student attendance and participation is critical. Students will therefore be allowed <u>no more than two absences</u> without documented proof of good reason (such as severe illness or death in the family). However, please note that attendance is mandatory on October 1st & October 22nd, when we will conduct peer critiques of paper drafts. Any additional absences will adversely affect the final grade for the course.
- -- We will use the course web site on Blackboard for various purposes, including the

submission of writing assignments. Please check the site regularly for announcments etc. It is your responsibility to maintain a functioning email account linked to Blackboard.

- -- There are numerous written assignments spaced throughout the semester and it is vital that you do not fall behind. <u>Late assignments</u> will be subject to a grade penalty, to be applied at the instructor's discretion.
- -- Students who violate University rules on <u>scholastic dishonesty</u> are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. **Please be aware that I will refer all instances of plagiarism (even a paragraph long!) to the Dean of Students**, along with a grade of zero for the assignment, at the minimum.
- -- Students with disabilities who need <u>special accommodations</u> should notify the instructor by presenting a letter prepared by the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. To ensure that the most appropriate accommodations can be provided, students should contact the SSD Office at 471-6259 or 471-4641 TTY.

Schedule of Class Meetings & Assignments

WK 1. INTRODUCTION

W Aug. 29 Introduction to Course

WK 2. MAHABHARATA: A FAMILY DISPUTE

W Sept. 5 The Epic Characters & Their Setting reading -- Narasimhan, *Mahabharata*, pp. 1-43.

ISSUE: How is the Pandava/Kaurava genealogy crucial to the plot?

WK 3. MAHABHARATA: EVENTS LEADING TO THE GREAT WAR

M Sept. 10 The Path to War

W Sept. 12 Discussion: Causes of Conflict

reading -- Narasimhan, *Mahabharata*, pp. 44-120; Das, *Difficulty of Being Good*, pp. 33-87. (chaps 2-3)

ISSUE: What are the main causes of conflict and who is responsible? (Could the war have been avoided?)

WK 4. HEROIC ETHOS OF THE MAHABHARATA

- M Sept. 17 Warrior Values and Exemplary Heroes
- W Sept. 19 Discussion: Heroic Characters //reading response 1 due at noon

reading -- Narasimhan, *Mahabharata*, pp. 121-78; Das, *Difficulty of Being Good*, pp. 88-182; "The Robbing of the Earrings," from *MBh vol. 2*, trans. van Buitenen.

ISSUE: Which epic characater best exemplifies kingly and/or warrior qualities? (Pick one character and defend your choice.)

WK 5. MEANINGS OF THE MAHABHARATA

M Sept. 24 Debate over Message: Bhakti or Dharma?

W Sept. 26 Discussion: Lessons of the Epic // **reading response 2** due at noon reading -- Narasimhan, *Mahabharata*, pp. 179-216;
Das, *Difficulty of Being Good*, pp. 183-311.

ISSUE: What are the *Mahabharata*'s central messages? (Focus on one or two.)

WK 6. INTRODUCTION TO RAMAYANA

M Oct. 1 Peer Review Session // paper 1 draft due at noon

W Oct. 3 Overview of Valmiki Ramayana

reading -- Narayan, Ramayana

ISSUE: How do *Ramayana*'s plot and characters differ from the *Mahabharata*?

WK 7. COMPARING RAMA STORIES

M Oct. 8 Major Retellings of the Rama Story// paper 1 revision due at 3pm

W Oct. 10 Discussion: Variations in Story // reading response 3 due at noon

reading -- A. K. Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Ramayanas"; selection from *Ramayana of Valmiki, Vol. 3: Aranyakandha* selection from *Forest Book of the Ramayana of Kampan;* Velcheru Narayana Rao, "When Does Sita Cease to Be Sita?".

ISSUE: What are the major variations in the story and why do they occur?

WK. 8. MEANINGS OF THE RAMAYANA TODAY

M Oct. 15 Ramayana in Modern Media & Politics

W Oct. 17 Discussion: A Nationalist Rama //reading response 4 due at noon

reading -- Davis, "The Iconography of Rama's Chariot;"
Mankekar, "Mediating Modernities";
Dharwadkar, "Censoring the Ramayana."

ISSUE: How & why has the *Ramayana* been at the center of conflict in recent times?

WK 9. PERFORMING ORAL EPICS

M Oct. 22 Peer Review Session/ paper 2 draft due at noon

W Oct. 24 Performing the Pabuji Epic

reading -- Smith, *Epic of Pabuji*, 9-56; Dalrymple, "Homer in India."

ISSUE: Why, how, and to whom does the Pabuji epic have a religious significance?

WK 10. THE TALE OF PABUJI

M Oct. 29 Pabuji and Indian Oral Epics // paper 2 revision due at 3pm

W Oct. 31 Discussion: Pabuji as Folk Epic // **reading response 5** due at noon reading -- Smith, *Epic of Pabuji*, 58-151.

ISSUE: How do oral folk epics like Pabuji differ from the classical epics?

WK 11. EXPLORING PAPER TOPICS

M Nov. 5 Library Session with Merry Burlingham, meet at PCL

W Nov. 7 no class (individual research)

WK 12. PLANNING PAPER 3: INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

M Nov. 12 no class (individual meetings w/instructor)

W Nov. 14 no class (individual meetings w/instructor)

paper 3 proposal due noon Friday

WK 13. WRITING PAPER 3

M Nov. 19 no class (individual writing)

W Nov. 21 no class (individual writing)

WK 14. PRESENTATION OF PAPER

M Nov. 26 Oral Presentations by class members

W Nov. 28 Oral Presentations by class members // paper 3 draft due at noon

Wk 15. LOOKING AHEAD: CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF THE EPICS

M Dec. 3 To Be Announced // (paper 3 drafts to be returned)

W Dec. 5 Do the Epics Have a Future?

paper 3 revision due Friday Dec. 7th at 3 pm