Philosophy and Literature in India
Anand Venkatkrishnan
Course Syllabus

Course Description

Is philosophy literature? Is literature philosophy? What constitutes either of these seemingly disparate enterprises, formally and thematically, and what kinds of conjunctions can we imagine between them (philosophy in/of/as literature)? Can one translate these terms across cultures, ? Are they the sole prerogative of leisured elites, or can they harbor and cultivate voices of dissent? Above all, what does it mean to reflect on these categories outside the parochial context of the Western world? This course explores these questions by introducing some of the literary cultures, philosophical traditions, religious poetry, and aesthetic theories of the South Asian subcontinent. Students will encounter a variety of genres including scriptural commentary, drama and courtly poetry, and the autobiography. Readings, all in translation, will range from Sanskrit literature to Sufi romances and more.

Books (all readings provided as pdfs)


Recommended General Reading

Hadot, Pierre. Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault. Oxford;


NB:

Readings marked with an asterisk ( * ) are not required, only recommended for personal edification.
Class Requirements

- Attendance and Participation
  - Students will sign up to lead one discussion session based on the others' responses.
- Weekly Responses on Class Blog
  - These will be due the day before each class meeting. They will not be graded, but shared among the class for discussion.
- Final Paper (8-10 pp.) or Presentation

Schedule

Week 1: The Veda and its (Dis)contents

a. How to Live

b. Dialogue and Danger
   - Patrick Olivelle, Upaniṣads, pp. 52-71 (Br. Up. 4.1-4.5), pp. 148-156 (Ch. Up. 6).

Week 2: Epics and Ethics

a. Suffering, Social Status, and Narrative Strategies
   - Emily Hudson, Disorienting Dharma: Ethics and the Aesthetics of Suffering, pp. 3-46.

b. Virtue, Violence, and Women's Voices
   - Emily Hudson, Disorienting Dharma, pp. 97-105, 218-224.

Week 3: Buddhism and Narrative Ethics
a. Mo' Karma Mo' Problems


b. Sex Changes and Storytelling


Week 4: Classical Indian Philosophy

a. Dialectic and Debate


b. Truth and Truth-Telling


Week 5: Classical Indian Literature

a. Theorizing Literature


b. Of the Standard of Taste


Week 6: Ministry of Silly Talks

a. Philosophy and Public Disputation

b. Reasoning and Religious Pluralism

**Week 7: Don't Believe Everything You Think**
a. Sleep and Dreams

b. Illusion and Reality

**Week 8: Poetry, Poetics, Poeisis**
a. All the World's a Stage

b. Flights of Fancy, Imaginative Insights

**Week 9: What’s Love Got To Do With It?**
a. Love in the Time of Scholarship I

b. Love in the Time of Scholarship II

**Week 10: Experience, Theory, Empathy, Transformation**
a. Dalit Lives Matter