Sacred Music of South Asia (MUET 5210/6010)

Instructor
Dr. Vivek Virānī
(pronouns: he/him/his)

Email
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Class Timing
1-3:50 PM Monday via Zoom

Office Hours
by appointment via Zoom

Course Overview
This class explores music genres and sound practices associated with sacred / religious / spiritual traditions of India and Pakistan. We will use primary sources to understand emic conceptions of sound from South Asian philosophical traditions, and ethnographic case studies to understand how music and religion play into contemporary discourses of identity, politics, gender, nation, and modernity. We will also engage with these traditions experientially; during each class session, students will learn a song or chant from a different genre or sacred tradition.

Course Materials
All reading and listening examples will be posted on Canvas. Students are responsible for regularly checking Canvas to ensure they are up to date with the material.

Evaluation
Your final grade will be based on the following criteria:

• Participation: 30%
• Weekly Reading Responses: 30%
• Final Project: 40%

Course Information
Expectations
Students are expected to attend class regularly and participate in seminar discussions. Students who are unable or unwilling to participate in discussions over Zoom should contact the instructor as soon as possible to arrange for other possible ways they may receive participation credit. Students should complete all assigned reading for each week before class and be prepared to discuss it.

Each week, students will submit a written response to the week’s readings, due by 8pm Sunday. This response should be written in formal, well-constructed academic prose and should contain a) a summary of the main ideas or information the student has synthesized from each reading, b) their responses or critiques to the author’s approach or conclusion, and c) reflections on how ideas within the reading may be extended to further research, or might be relevant to their own projects. There is no required length for responses, but I expect a minimum of 1-2 pages double-spaced per reading will be necessary.
Each student will develop an original research project culminating in a final paper (due December 1) and a presentation during the final two weeks of class. Students may choose any research topic, as long as it pertains broadly to spiritual/religious/profound sound practices of South Asia. Topics must be approved by instructor. Students are expected to present a well-constructed argument supported by adequate background research. Ideally, the paper should draw from both contemporary academic discourse and traditional/indigenous paradigms of thought. Papers should be approximately 12-15 pages for MA students, and 15-20 pages for PhD students.

Finally, in class we will be learning and practicing several different forms of Nād-yoga (sound meditation). These are not religious practices, but rather are forms of mental discipline connected with South Asian philosophy of sound and inner experience. Students are expected to practice these techniques as “homework” for at least 5 minutes, 3 times a week, and to keep a journal of their experiential learning through the process. The instructor will not be reading these journals, but students will be given opportunities to share and discuss sections from them during seminar discussions.

COVID-19 Attendance Policy

While attendance is expected as outlined above, it is important for all of us to be mindful of the health and safety of everyone in our community, especially given concerns about COVID-19. Please contact me if you are unable to attend class because you are ill, or unable to attend class due to a related issue regarding COVID-19. It is important that you communicate with me prior to being absent as to what may be preventing you from coming to class so I may make a decision about accommodating your request to be excused from class. If you are experiencing cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, or any of the other possible symptoms of COVID-19 (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptomtesting/symptoms.html) please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or askSHWC@unt.edu) or your health care provider. While attendance is an important part of succeeding in this class, your own health, and those of others in the community, is more important.

Course Schedule

**WEEK 1 | August 24 | Introduction to South Asian Sacred Traditions and Sound Culture**
- *Hamsa-Upaniṣhad*
- *Nād- BINDU Upaniṣhad*

**WEEK 2 | August 31 | Vedic and Vedantic Conceptions of Sound**
- Rowell, Lewis (1992) “Thought”; “Sound”; “Chant” from *Music and Musical Thought in Early India*
- *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣhad*

**WEEK 3 | September 7 | **LABOR DAY – NO CLASS****
- Kirin Narayan (2016) *Everyday Creativity: Singing Goddesses in the Himalayan Foothills*
WEEK 4 | September 14 | **Nād-Brahma - Sound as Divinity in Philosophy and Practice**
- Clarke, David, and Tara Kini (2011) “North Indian Classical Music and its Links with Consciousness: The Case of Dhrupad”
- Wilke, Annette, and Oliver Moebus (2011) Selections from *Sound and Communication: An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism*
- Selections from *Saṅgītratnākara* of Śhāṅgdeva

Week 5 | September 21 | **Bhakti - Devotion in Song**
- Jackson, William (1993) “Features of the Kriti: A Song Form Developed by Tyāgarāja”
- Kaur, Inderjit (2016) “Multiple Authenticities in Motion: Styles and Stances in Sikh Sabad Kīrtan”
- Hawley, John S. (1988) “Author and Authority in the Bhakti Music of North India”
- Poetry selections by Mirabai, Tukaram, Tyagaraja

WEEK 6 | September 28 | **Sufism – Qawwālī and Shrine Musics**
- Selections from Qureshi (1986) *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan*
- Sardar, Ziauddin (2003) - “Postmodern(ising) Qawwali”
- Poetry selections by Amir Khusrau, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai

WEEK 7 | October 5 | **Sufism – Folk and Popular Styles**
- Poetry selections by Bulleh Shah, Sachal Sarmast

WEEK 8 | October 12 | **Changing Contexts and Performance Practice**
- Manuel, Peter (1993) “Devotional Music” from *Cassette Culture*
- Poetry selections by Lalon Fakir

WEEK 9 | October 19 | **Femininity and Non-Binary Gender**
- Roy, Jeff (2017) – “From Jalsah to Jalsā: Music, Identity, and (Gender) Transitioning at a Hijrā Rite of Initiation”
- Srinivasan, Amrit (1985) “Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and her Dance”
- *Ardhanārīśhvara Stotram*

**WEEK 10 | October 26 | Religious Nationalism in Music**

**WEEK 11 | November 2 | Protest and Dissent**
- Film: Sherinian, Zoe (2017) *This is a Music: Reclaiming an Untouchable Drum*
- Zelliot, Eleanor (1980) “Chokhamela and Eknath: Two *Bhakti* Modes of Legitimacy for Modern Change”

**WEEK 12 | November 9 | Nirguṇ Philosophy and Music**
- Virani, Vivek “Pierced by the Arrow of Song”, “Where do you Search for Me?”
- Poetry selections by Kabir, Bananath, Bhavani Nath

**WEEK 13 | November 16**
- Topics TBD

**WEEK 14-15 | November 23 & 30 | Student Final Presentations**

**FINAL PAPER DUE THURSDAY DECEMBER 1**

**POLICIES AND RESOURCES**

**Library Reserves**

The following resources are being kept on reserve at the Music Library for this course:


We will have assigned readings from many of these texts. They will also be invaluable to students researching for their final projects. Most are available in electronic form through the library website (iii.library.unt.edu). Due to the difficulty of in-person access, our librarians are working hard to make the other sources available electronically within the first two weeks of the semester. During final project research, students are also encouraged to consult with the instructor and the librarians to find more sources related to their topic(s) of choice.

Statement of Religious Liberty

Some of the songs we will sing during this class have texts that implicitly or explicitly refer to deities or other religious concepts. Our performance of this music does not, of course, amount to a profession of any particular faith. Within India, it is the norm for singers of all faiths to perform texts from any religious tradition, and to take their own aesthetic or spiritual meanings from these pieces.

If however, your own religious beliefs – including beliefs in secular humanism or atheism – prohibit you from singing these words, please talk to me and we will work out an alternative.

Academic Integrity

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam, and most likely be assigned a failing grade for the course. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students, who may impose further penalty. According to the UNT catalog, the term “cheating” includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term “plagiarism” includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

Writing Lab

Strong writing skills are an important asset in academic and professional life in every field. During class, we will work to improve student writing skills through instructor feedback and group workshops. However, many students will benefit from intensive focus on writing skills that we will not have time to provide during class. I encourage all students who wish to further develop their writing skills to work with the UNT Writing Lab. [http://writinglab.unt.edu/](http://writinglab.unt.edu/)

Student Counseling and Testing Services

It is important to us for students to excel academically, but it is far more important that you maintain your physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Students face many demands and responsibilities from their academic and personal lives and sometimes the stresses or anxieties can be overwhelming if not dealt with. As your instructor, I am happy to be a part of your support network, and am always open to talk if you have issues you would like to discuss.
Additionally, UNT provides its students many resources for mental and emotional health. 
http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-testing-services

Office of Disability Accommodation

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at http://www.unt.edu/oda. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.