

South Asian Studies

South Asian Studies is an interdisciplinary concentration in which students work across the humanities and social sciences, geographical locations, and time periods. The concentration emphasizes both the diversity of South Asia as a region, as well as the long-term historical connections among people and places in Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The concentration takes a comparative approach, bringing attention to history, politics, and culture within the region, as well as in the equally vital global South Asian diaspora.

For additional information, please visit the department's website: <https://watson.brown.edu/southasia/students> (<https://watson.brown.edu/southasia/students/>)

South Asian Studies Concentration Requirements

South Asian Studies is an interdisciplinary concentration in which students work across the humanities and social sciences, geographical locations, and time periods. The concentration emphasizes both the diversity of South Asia as a region, as well as the long-term historical connections among people and places in Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The concentration takes a comparative approach, bringing attention to history, politics, and culture within the region, as well as in the equally vital global South Asian diaspora.

Course Requirements

All South Asian Studies concentrators must take and pass 10 courses as approved by their concentration advisor. Students who wish to earn honors must take 12 courses total (see Senior-Year Project below).

SAST 0700	Introduction to Modern South Asia	1
or HIST 1620	Resisting Empire: Gandhi and the Making of Modern South Asia	

Two courses in the Humanities with a majority focus in South Asia, such as:

CLAS 0995	India's Classical Performing Arts	
CLAS 1140	Classical Philosophy of India	
COST 0030	Sound, Song and Salvation in South Asia	
COST 0034	Dharma: A History of Classical Indian Civilization	
COST 0035	Saints and Mystics of India	
COST 0036	Love and War in India	
COST 0037	Sensing the Sacred: Sensory Culture in South Asian Religions	
COST 0140	Food, Religion and Politics in South Asia	
COST 0145	Karma, Rebirth and Liberation: Life and Death in South Asian Religions	
COST 0525	The History and Practice of Yoga in India and Beyond	
COST 0526	This Whole World is OM: Mantras in Indian Religions	
HIAA 0013	Introduction to Indian Art	
HIAA 0023	South Asian Art and Architecture	
LITR 1231K	Innovations in Indian Literature	
RELS 0096	The Imaginary Lives of Muslims	
RELS 1510	Islamic Imaginaries from South Asia	
RELS 0036	Love and War in India	
RELS 0037	Sensing the Sacred: Sensory Culture in South Asian Religions	
RELS 0526	This Whole World is OM: Mantras in Indian Religions	

Two courses in the Social Sciences with a majority focus on South Asia, such as:

HIST 1979D	Ruined History: Visual and Material Culture in South Asia	
POLS 1280	The Rise of India: History, Politics, Economics and Society	
POLS 1821O	Politics of Economic Development in Asia	
POLS 2320	Ethnic Conflict	
POLS 2330	Politics in India	
SAST 0750	Understanding the Indian Economy	
SAST 0725	Political Ecology in South Asia	
SAST 0526	This Whole World is OM: Mantras in Indian Religions	
SAST 0525	The History and Practice of Yoga in India and Beyond	
SAST 0140	Food, Religion and Politics in South Asia	
SAST 0037	Sensing the Sacred: Sensory Culture in South Asian Religions	
SAST 0034	Dharma: A History of Classical Indian Civilization	

At least five additional elective courses. Students can take additional courses in the humanities or social sciences with a focus on South Asia, such as: 5

At least three of the five electives must be drawn from the department pre-approved course listings (or be approved by the DUS/Concentration advisor). The courses on this pre-approved list have significant (at least 25%) South Asia content.

No more than two of the remaining electives can be courses with less empirical South Asia content, but these courses must have theoretical relevance to the study of South Asia (with the approval from the DUS).

ANTH 0100	Introduction to Cultural Anthropology	
ANTH 2320	Anthropology and Development: Critical Ethnographic Perspectives	
COST 0032	Music and Meditation	
COST 0100	Introduction to Contemplative Studies	
ECON 0510	Development and the International Economy	
ECON 1530	Health, Hunger and the Household in Developing Countries	
ECON 2510	Economic Development I	
HIAA 0081	Architecture of the House Through Space and Time	
HIST 0150D	Refugees: A Twentieth-Century History	
HIST 1440	The Ottomans: Faith, Law, Empire	
HNDI 0200	Beginning Hindi or Urdu	
HNDI 0400	Intermediate Hindi-Urdu	
HNDI 1080	Advanced Hindi-Urdu	
MCM 1505O	Does Utopia Still Exist? Media, politics and the hope of something else	
POLS 0200	Introduction to Comparative Politics	
POLS 1380	Ethnic Politics and Conflict	
RELS 0100	Buddhist Thought, Practice, and Society	
SAST 1970	Independent Study	
SANS 0200	Elementary Sanskrit II	
SANS 0400	Classical Sanskrit Story Literature	
SANS 1030	The Bhāgavata Purāṇa: Text and Reception	
SANS 1100	Vedic Sanskrit	

Total Credits 10

Language Requirements

Proficiency in a South Asian language is required for the concentration. Demonstrating proficiency can entail passing a written and oral

examination, 4 semesters of formal language study at Brown or another institution, or a high school transcript indicating that the language of instruction for all courses was a South Asian language. Native Hindi/Urdu speakers are encouraged to fulfill the language requirement by taking another South Asian language for four semester, such as Sanskrit at Brown or a relevant language at another institution. Up to two language courses can count toward fulfilling the student's elective requirements.

An **Honors Thesis** is a two-semester independent study supervised by a thesis advisor (SAST 1970). These two courses constitute the additional courses needed for honors in the concentration.

An honors thesis can be textual, or it can take other forms (multi-media, visual, artistic, or musical, for example). The form and substance of a non-textual honors thesis must conform to the rigorous regulations set out by the relevant department(s) and the Dean of the College.

Additional Honors Requirements

To be eligible for Honors, students will have earned an "A" in the majority of graded courses for the concentration.

Students may graduate with Honors in South Asian Studies by completing an undergraduate Honors thesis under the supervision of at least one reader drawn from the South Asian Studies faculty* and one additional reader from the Brown (or RISD, in the case of Brown-RISD students) faculty community.

In order to pursue Honors, students must submit the following materials to the South Asian studies Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) by the end of their 6th semester:

1. A prospectus (3-5 pages, describing the major research questions and methods to be used, complete with bibliography) that has been read and vetted by the student's intended primary reader.
2. An email from the faculty member who will serve as primary reader to the South Asian Studies DUS noting their willingness to advise the thesis.

In addition, students must:

1. Enroll in a two-semester sequence of independent study [SAST 1970 or under a relevant departmental course code].
2. Designate a second reader by the end of the first month of their 7th semester. Second readers should also confirm their willingness to serve as a reader by sending an email to the South Asian Studies DUS.
3. Be in regular contact with thesis advisor about the progress of the project.
4. Present their research to the Saxena Center community during their final semester.

For **mid-year graduating students**, the topic and primary reader must be identified and confirmed by mid-November of the junior year, and a second reader must be arranged and confirmed by January 30 of the senior year.

* This includes all people listed under the Faculty, Postdoctoral Associate, and Visiting Scholars (limited to those in residence at Brown) tabs on the Saxena Center website

Senior-Year Project

Students must complete either a senior capstone project OR an honors thesis.

Capstone projects or honors theses are opportunities for students to creatively synthesize the thinking on South Asia that they have developed during the concentration. The project should exhibit an empirically and theoretically driven research question or argument about some aspect of South Asian Studies. The senior-year project should involve some research in at least one South Asian language.

All students are encouraged to start thinking about their capstones in their junior year.

Capstones can take two primary forms:

1. A research paper of approximately 30 pages on a topic related to South Asia for an existing concentration-eligible course, undertaken with the permission of the instructor.
2. An independent study-based project. The produce and/or process that constitutes this can be artistic, primary or secondary research-based,

internship-related, or something else. The project must be supervised by at least one South Asian Studies faculty member* for at least one semester under SAST 1970. This course can count towards the five elective requirement.

At the end of the junior year, each student should meet with the Director of Undergraduate Study (DUS) to review their plan for completing their capstone. If pursuing a capstone project, students will be required to submit, by the end of the shopping period of the fall of their senior year, a short proposal (300 words) that describes how they are going to complete this requirement.

Courses

SAST 0034. Dharma: A History of Classical Indian Civilization.

Dharma—a Sanskrit word encompassing duty, ethics, law, and religion—is a common thread running through the cultures of premodern India. This course offers a history of Indian civilization from its origins up through the end of the classical period. Drawing on a rich array of textual, material, and expressive cultures, we trace the arc of human history on the subcontinent, paying special attention to the intersections of religion and politics. The sources at hand reveal the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, and attest to human efforts to redefine what it means to live a life according to dharma.

SAST 0037. Sensing the Sacred: Sensory Culture in South Asian Religions.

This course explores South Asian religions through the body, the senses, and aesthetics. Drawing on Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, and concentrating on embodied practices such as meditation, chanting, eating, sex, asceticism, ritual, possession, and performance, we will examine experiences of the sacred in India, past and present. How has sensory culture shaped lives, practices, and doctrines? What place do the senses have in South Asian traditions? Drawing on premodern law codes, erotic handbooks, and medical treatises; and integrating new media from ethnographic films to graphic novels, we will plunge into the rich sense-worlds of religions in South Asia.

SAST 0067. Divine Drugs: Psychedelics, Religion, and Spirituality.

From LSD to magic mushrooms, mescaline to ayahuasca, psychedelics are drugs that alter consciousness and perceptions of reality. This course investigates the central role that religion and spirituality have played in the long, tangled history of psychedelics, from colonial eradication of psychedelics as indigenous sacraments, to psychedelic modes of expanding consciousness in 1960s counterculture; from the moral panic around these substances as a tool of mind control, to their present scientific investigation as a panacea for mental health, addiction, and self-realization. Interweaving primary sources and scholarly accounts on psychedelics, our inquiry will use an interdisciplinary approach, blending religious studies, philology, anthropology, the history of science, and art history. To explore this varied terrain, we survey the history of divine drugs around the world, even as we ruminate on the wisdom and philosophy they have inspired over the ages.

SAST 0140. Food, Religion and Politics in South Asia.

Why study food? What can food tell us about religion, politics, and culture? Food in South Asia often shapes identity, social status, ritual purity, religious belonging, and political activism—the notion that you are what you eat has wide currency. Whatever form it takes, food embodies histories of migration, trade, empire, colonialism, and ethics. Through reading primary texts and ethnographic articles, watching films, and (of course) eating delicious food, we will explore the rich foodways of South Asia and their social, religious, and political ramifications.

SAST 0145. Karma, Rebirth and Liberation: Life and Death in South Asian Religions.

Karma, Sanskrit for the "action" that makes up a human life, has been a central concern for the religious traditions of South Asia throughout their history. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism share the belief that after death people are reborn, taking on lives according to their actions in lives previous. In these traditions, liberation from the cycle of rebirth becomes the ultimate goal of human existence. This course examines the ideas of karma, rebirth and liberation in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism from historical, cosmological, ritual, narrative, iconographic and theological points of view. We also look at these ideas in Western culture.

SAST 0525. The History and Practice of Yoga in India and Beyond.

From its roots in premodern India to its current popularity worldwide, yoga has a rich a complex history. As a practice of the mind, body, and spirit, yoga has taken many forms—meditation, chanting, breath control, postures—in order to achieve a range of goals: liberation from rebirth, supernatural powers, strength, pleasure, peace, wellness. As its reputation and commodification have increased, yoga has attracted deep interest, debate, and even controversy. In this course we will study yoga from its earliest texts to its status in the modern world, addressing its historical, religious, social, and political ramifications in many different contexts.

SAST 0526. This Whole World is OM: Mantras in Indian Religions.

A mantra is a syllable or formula used in ritual and meditation. Mantras are central to Indian religions—not only Hinduism, but also Jainism, Buddhism, Sufism, and Sikhism. Some mantras are made up of words and language—usually in Sanskrit—while others are sound fragments with no semantic meaning. The sacred syllable OM, now a global symbol of Eastern spirituality, exemplifies the power and authority of mantra. What are mantras? What do they accomplish? How do they shape identities, beliefs, and practices? Engaging with sacred utterance in various media, this course explores the world of mantras in India and beyond.

SAST 0700. Introduction to Modern South Asia.

This course will explore the making of modern South Asia through a dynamic conception of its peoples as historical actors who contributed to and engaged with the varied facets of the empire, resistance, and modernity. We will ask: How did resisting colonial rule include, exclude, or form creative attempts to adapt, appropriate, question, and reject elements of European modernity? What were the various complementary and competing visions of anti-colonial nationalism? How were these represented and turned into history writing? In other words, what is the relationship between power, culture, and knowledge? Finally, what are the contemporary political stakes in different narratives of the past? This course thus grapples with history as well as post-colonial theory, and provides students with comparative tools to engage with imperial forms, nationalism, and struggles that remade much of the global south by the mid-twentieth century.

SAST 0700A. Introduction to Modern South Asia: The Politics of States, Society, and Development in South Asia.

India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are collectively home to over 1.5 billion people, with rapidly growing economies. Yet, all three states continue to grapple with high levels of poverty, ethnic, religious, gender, and caste-based discrimination, and threats to deepening democracy. Despite a shared history of colonial rule and similar bureaucratic structures, these states have developed important differences in political regimes, systems of governance, and state-citizen linkages. This seminar is an introduction to States, Society, and Development in South Asia, drawing on academic literature primarily from political science, as well as sociology, and history. Over the semester, we will comparatively address themes such as the origins and consolidation of political regimes, the role of the state in economic growth and poverty alleviation, and the evolution of political parties, civil society, and social movements in organizing and making demands for rights.

SAST 0700B. Introduction to Modern South Asia: Public Health From Theory to Practice.

This course introduces students to public health in South Asia (including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka) through a health equity approach. We will examine the history, theories, and interventions that shape health care systems in South Asia in three ways. First, students will learn about fundamental historical shifts in public health from the British Raj before 1947, Nation-building between 1947 and 1971, and the present time in health care and policy in South Asia. Second, students will be introduced to structural and social determinants of health (e.g., race and ethnicity, caste, gender, socioeconomic position, sexual orientation) using an interdisciplinary approach rooted in global health theories. Finally, through case studies, we will examine health policies and initiatives across the South Asian region and critically delve into ethical dimensions, behavioral health, and sustainability.

SAST 0700C. Current Debates in Modern South Asia.

Abbreviated Course Description: This course provides a survey of the debates currently occupying scholarship on South Asia. Topics will include – the impacts of colonial modernity; the divergences as well as traffic between class, caste, and religion; the politics of representation in a democracy; forms of relatedness across intimate and geological scales; the distance or proximity between law and violence; the psychic and social consequences of economic liberalization. Throughout the course, we will examine debates over the pertinence of concepts considered to be from elsewhere to understanding South Asian life. Readings are drawn from the disciplines of anthropology, history, sociology, literary studies, political science, and media studies.

SAST 0725. Political Ecology in South Asia.

This course focuses on the complex issues of intra-(human)-species and interspecies inequality, the history of uneven development as well as ecological vulnerability of diverse South Asian societies, and the resulting environmental movements that intersect concerns for environment with that of social justice. First we explore the underlying theoretical premise of how environments can be understood as both 'natural' and 'social', and variations over time and space. Is there one Nature or multiple natures? Is Nature even natural? Is there something distinct about the ecology, political ecology, or the history of environmental movements in South Asia? Are the environmental justice movements emerging from the global south able to capture the intricate relationship that many indigenous people in South Asia have with their environment? And how do such movements respond to ecological challenges that are a result of activities of global magnitude?

SAST 0730. Economic and Human Development in South Asia.

This course takes stock of Economic and Human Development achieved in modern South Asia and discusses pertinent public policy issues across countries in an interdisciplinary framework. Following cross-country comparisons of various development indices, we will question the contribution of neo-liberal reforms in agricultural and industrial sectors in improving people's lives. We will draw upon the rich histories of struggles for economic rights and dignity, led by women, as well as caste and minority groups. We will also explore inequalities in income, wealth, access to health and education, as well as attempts to remedy these by way of social policy. Finally, we discuss the rapidly changing natural and political environments, as we shift our focus to communal tensions and climate change in this region.

SAST 0735. South Asia in the World and the World in South Asia.

This course gives a broad overview of South Asia's inextricable role in the making of the world and vice versa from the 13th century to the present. To counter the dangerous nationalisms the region has experienced recently, this course underlines the worldliness and the planetarity of South Asia. Course materials also examine gender, sexuality, caste, race, religion, indigeneity, class, region, et cetera, not just because justice demands that we critically examine inequalities and injustices perpetuated against those who are "different" but because the enormous diversity of lives and experiences in South Asia is a matter of fact. This interdisciplinary course draw on multimedia material, journalistic works and archival pieces to think critically about how the region known today as South Asia has come to be shaped socially, politically, affectively, and materially and how it has contributed to shaping the world.

SAST 0740. Anticolonial Perspectives from South Asia.

This seminar examines anticolonial perspectives that not only influenced twentieth century movements for decolonization and independence in South Asia, but also profoundly shaped struggles for equality and justice globally. We will explore major South Asian political and intellectual figures such as Gandhi, Ambedkar, Savarkar; revolutionaries, poets, and writers such as Bhagat Singh, Amrita Pritam, Namdeo Dhasal, Muhammad Iqbal, and Saadat Hassan Manto. The course will also engage with thinkers such as Martin Luther King, DuBois, Frantz Fanon, and Ghasan Kanafani, among others, to think in conversation with the repertoire of global anticolonial thought. The seminar is chance to closely read canonical as well as lesser-known primary sources to think through the entanglements between individual and collective liberation, religion and secularism, and ethics and politics, across intersections of caste, gender, race, and religion.

SAST 0745. The Making of Modern South Asia.

This undergraduate seminar course offers a historical introduction to South Asia – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Myanmar. It focuses on the historical evolution of the cultures, polities, and societies in this region from the eighteenth century, through colonial and post-colonial period, to the twenty first century. Using seminal historical events as entry points, this course will not only provide a comprehensive historical survey of this region but also explore several major themes and debates in South Asian historiography such as colonialism, orientalism, and modernity. It will also offer a critical analysis of the several post-independence issues that dominate this region. By utilizing a diverse archive of sources such academic texts, primary documents, movies, literature, and maps this course aims to provide students with a comprehensive overview of and the critical tools to engage with scholarship on

SAST 0750. Understanding the Indian Economy.

With a view to help understanding the Indian economy, the course will discuss a number of topics. The aim will be to become conversant with a number of contemporary issues such as demonetisation, Goods and Services Tax (GST), the GDP numbers controversy, fiscal federalism and the outlook for the Indian economy post-COVID. But understanding the economy today will also require becoming familiar with the past and how ideas, events, and developments of the past shaped the India of today in terms of the basic Indian development model, structural transformation, India's economic and financial crises, the state of state capacity, and gender and other outcomes.

SAST 1050. Contemporary Bollywood: The Cultural Logic of Popular Indian Cinema.

Bollywood, like Hollywood, is not just a cinematic genre but a discursive field that dominates popular imagination in South Asia, permeating its culture, society, and politics. Although rooted in Euro-American sensibilities, Bollywood films have emerged as a distinct form of cinematic representation in the late twentieth century. These films, characterized by flamboyant music, extravagant dance routines, high melodrama, lavish production values, and a focus on stars and spectacle, are deeply embedded in contemporary South Asian ethos. Each week will focus on one film and several key texts to uncover the ideological, social, and cultural logic of Bollywood. The course will link the films' formal structure and content to broader issues such as postcolonial national identity, pre-modern epic traditions, contemporary popular culture, history, globalization, and diaspora implications.

SAST 1970. Independent Study.

Section numbers vary by instructor. Please check CAB for the correct section number and CRN to use when registering for this course.

SAST XLIST. Courses of Interest to Concentrators.