

Islamicate Poetry in South Asia (REL 433/CLCS 4122)

Credit Hours: 4

Course Pre-Requisites: Reading ability in Urdu; Colloquial Punjabi

Instructor Name: Asif Ifitkhar

Schedule: Monday to Friday (2.30 PM – 5.20 PM)

Course Description

This seminar course is titled “Islamicate Poetry in South Asia” synecdochically as it focuses primarily on what might, across the selected time period in certain regions, be termed, at times with certain qualifications, as Urdu poetry, which time period would be from Amir Khusrow Dehlavi (d. 1325) to contemporary poets. Even in that focus, the course zeroes in far more on the ghazal with assertion of the arguable justification that it is this genre, at least in Urdu poetry, which enjoys as much popularity today as it did in earlier centuries and that it reflects many major themes and main expressions of “Classical” Urdu poetry. Yet the title may also be justified in that the course includes exposure to poetry in some other related languages of South Asia as Punjabi, Saraiki, Hindi and Persian. The study will include biographies of selected poets, forms, structures, parsing, intertextuality, conventions, poetics, aesthetics, hermeneutics, and criticism inter alia. However, it will not delve as such into pertinent social theory or political history. The basic objective of this course is to enhance affective enjoyment of selected poetry with as little interference from the instructor in actual reading of texts as possible. Nevertheless, the course does offer a formal study of what might seem as an arbitrary or subjective selection. One might, therefore, mention as an example that one of the numerous selection criteria (this one too could have been left unstated) is availability and popularity of a poem on public domain websites where students can hear it or view it performed. This aspect shall also be highlighted in study of how so many metres are designed to fit neatly into certain melodies (for example, kamil Mathman Salim into Raga Darbari). Nevertheless, there might be objectionable omission of poems or poets, which omission, it is hoped, will not be too prejudicial to the overall course objective. The course also aims to teach poetry composition at a basic level of skill.

