**Course Description**

As the cover of this syllabus suggests, India’s religious diversity—in both breadth and depth—is perhaps without parallel in the world. As an in-depth introduction to that diversity, this course offers a basic, historical overview of India’s many faiths—including Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam. In addition to exploring the origins and major characteristics of these traditions, however, the course aims to provoke student thinking about the significance of religious practice in the study of religion. To this end the course highlights the variety of means through which the sacred has been and continues to be enacted and constructed throughout South Asian history. These include, among other things, the use of sound, sacrifice, divine embodiment, asceticism, worship and song, violence and politics. When viewed through these interpretive lenses, the solid boundaries between what we often think of as separate ‘religions’ may become porous or may disappear altogether.

**Required Texts (available in the Grinnell Bookstore)**

*Mirabai*, Amar Citra Katha comics.


Hawley, John Stratton and Mark Juergensmeyer. *Songs of the Saints of India*.


All other readings will be made available either ahead of time as a handout or on the E-Reserve (E-R on syllabus) site under the folder “Documents” on the course Blackboard.

**Office Hours**

Monday & Wednesday, 9-11 a.m. If you would like to meet with me during office hours, please sign up ahead of time on the weekly schedule, which will be posted on my office door. If you have a regular scheduling conflict with my office hours, please let me know within the first two weeks of class.

**Course Requirements**

The following components will comprise the final grade for this course. Please let me know within the first full week of classes if, for any reason, you believe that special considerations need to be taken into account in evaluating your performance this semester (e.g., a learning disability, medical condition, etc.). I would be glad to talk with you about this.

**Attendance and Participation (20%)**

Students are expected to attend the class punctually and regularly, to ask informed questions, and to respect each other, the professor, and guests. An attendance sheet will be passed around at the beginning of each class; it is students’ responsibility to be sure to sign this sheet every class. Since late arrivals and early departures disrupt class, I will count two tardies, two early departures, or any combination of the two as an absence. More than two unexcused absences during the course of the semester will have a significant, adverse effect on your final grade. For
an absence to be “excused” requires: an e-mail from you before the class meets alerting me of your coming absence and the reason for it, as well as documentation from a relevant source (Health or Student Services, etc.).

To facilitate students’ ability to actively join in more in-depth discussion, the class will switch to a seminar format (location TBA) on Wednesdays. If these discussions are to be successful, students will need to have carefully read the assigned texts, to have them in hand (including those posted on E-Reserve) in class and to actively take part in discussion.

Finally, on 10/9 class will run over the scheduled time by roughly one hour, so that we can view the movie version of the Mahabharata as a group. You must let me know ahead of time if you cannot stay for the final hour; if so you will be able to finish viewing the film at the AV Center.

**Short Response Paper (2-3 pages) (10 %)**

Students will be asked to write a short, clearly-focused response paper (due date: 9/15). I will circulate a list of essay questions related to our readings from which students may select. (Students may be permitted to write on a topic of their own design, provided they come to speak with me about it before writing.)

**Seminar Leadership (10 %)**

Students are required to sign-up in pairs as seminar leaders for one week of the term. Seminar leaders have the following four responsibilities: 1) preparation and posting of an agenda of questions to the “Discussion Board” (Pioneerweb) by 9 p.m. Tuesday night; 2) preparation of a short (2-3 page) seminar paper to be presented to the group (including copies for all seminar participants) at the beginning of seminar; 3) active presentation of your own thoughts and questions, and active leadership of the discussion in seminar; 4) short (1 page) reflection on presentation/discussion to be handed in with agenda and seminar paper by Friday of that week.

**Take-home Mid-term Examination (20%)**

Students will take a mid-term exam covering material from the first half of the course. *The Midterm is due by 3 p.m. in mailbox, Steiner Main Office on 10/13.*

**Group Presentations (20%)**

During Week Eight the class will work out a list of themes/topics related to the course from which students will select options according to their interests. Presentation groups will be determined on the basis of student interest. Presentation proposals will be due on 11/10 by 3 p.m. (hard copy in my mailbox in Steiner Main Office), and the presentations themselves will be made in class, during the last week and a half of the term.

**Final examination (20%)**

Students will take a take-home final examination covering material from the entire semester.

**Note on Handing in Assignments**

All assignments must be submitted in hard copy form either in class or to my mailbox in Steiner. No e-mail copies will be accepted in place of a hard copy.

**Academic Honesty**

For a helpful discussion of and practical guidelines for following Grinnell’s Academic Honesty policies see: [http://web.grinnell.edu/WritingLab/CitationGuides/achondiscuss.html](http://web.grinnell.edu/WritingLab/CitationGuides/achondiscuss.html)
Class and Reading Schedule

Week One

8/28 Introduction

8/30 Representing Religion: Hindu-ism or Hindu-isn’t?
   read Flood, Chapter 1
   read Said, “Orientalism” (E-R)

Week Two

9/4 The Roots of Hinduism
   read Flood, Chapter Two, “Ancient Origins”
   and Chapter Three, “Dharma”

9/6 The Sound of Scripture (Seminar)
   read Graham, Scripture as Spoken Word (E-R)
   Paper #1 Assignment Handed Out

Week Three

9/11 Living Ritually
   read Flood, Chapter Nine, “Ritual”
   read Anantha Murthy, Samskāra

9/13 Seminar
   read Anantha Murthy, Samskāra

9/15 Paper Due by 3 p.m. in my mailbox in Steiner Main Office

Week Four

9/18 Moksha
   read Flood, Chapter 4, “Yoga and Renunciation,” 75-102

   Recommended reading
   Flood, Chapter 10, “Hindu Theology and Philosophy”

9/20 The World in the Body
   read Olivelle, “Deconstructing the Body in Indian Asceticism” (E-R)
   read Flood, Chapter 7, “Shaiva and tantric religion”
Week Five

9/25  Śrama  as Jainism and Buddhism
      read Embree, “The Background of Jainism and Buddhism,” pp. 43-75, 93-114 (E-R)

9/27  Krishna (Seminar)
      read Flood, Chapter 5
      read Bhagavad Gītā (including “Introduction”)

      Recommended Weblink
      To hear a few key verses of the Gītā recited in Sanskrit go to:
      (Note: you may need to download Shockwave in order to listen and view.)

Week Six

10/2  India’s Greatest Epic: The Mahābhārata
      read Narasimhan, The Mahābhārata

10/4  The Mahābhārata (no seminar)
      read Narasimhan

      Midterm Take-home Distributed

Week Seven

10/9  The Mahābhārata
      read Narasimhan

      Film version of the Mahābhārata,
      Extended Class (2 hrs. 46 mins.) (attendance required)

10/11 The Mahābhārata (Seminar)

10/13 Mid-term Take-home Due by 3 p. m. in mailbox, Steiner Main Office

October Break
Week Eight

10/23  Bhakti with Form (sāgūda)
read Flood, Chapter 6, “For the Love of Vishnu”
read Hawley, “Introduction,” “Mirabai,” “Surdas”
read Mirabai (comic book)

10/25  Bhakti without Form (Seminar)
read Hawley, “Kabir” and “Nanak”

Selection of Group Presentation Topics due Friday by email

Week Nine

10/30  Islam and Sufism in India
read Gandhi, Revenge and Reconciliation (E-R)
read Ernst, Sufism (E-R)

11/1  The Raj, Religion and Sikhism (Seminar)
read Oberoi, The Construction of Religious Boundaries (E-R)

Week Ten

11/6  Library Session for Group Presentations

11/8  The Hindu Renaissance
read Flood, Chapter 11
read Hay, “Leaders of Hindu Reform and Revival,” pp. 36-83 (E-R)

11/10 Group Presentation Proposals Due by 3 p.m. in mailbox Steiner Main Office

Week Eleven

11/13  Gandhi
read Hay, “Mahatma Gandhi,” pp. 243-274 (E-R)

11/15  Grasping Hold of Truth (satyagraha) (Seminar)
read Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, pp. 3-145, 226-242
Week Twelve

11/20  Film: Father, Son and Holy War

11/22  Library Research for Group Presentation (make sure to sign-in)

Week Thirteen

11/27  The Goddess and Mother India
       read Flood, Chapter 8, “The Goddess and Śākta Traditions,”

11/29  Group Presentations

Week Fourteen

12/4  Group Presentations

12/6  Group Presentations