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.
Anantha Murthy. Samskara: Rite for a Dead Man.
Bhagavad Gita. Barbara Stoller Miller, tr.
John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayan, eds. The Life of Hinduism
R. K. Narayan, The Ramayana

All other readings will be made available either ahead of time as a handout (HO) or on E-Reserve (ER).

Office Hours
Thursday, 9-12. 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 Fridays. 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.

Short Paper (4-5 pages) (15%)
Students will be asked to write a short, clearly-focused response paper. 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 or email me about it before writing.) Due in class on 9/28.

Posting (10 %)
On the weeks that we have seminar, students are required to post on the class discussion board. Posts should, for the most part (at least ¾ of your posts) be in response to the questions posted by Wednesday night by the discussion leaders. Length of posts may vary from week to week but the majority of your posts should develop a point for between half and a whole page. Posts should draw specifically on the reading (including direct quotations and page numbers). Posting is required even if you cannot attend seminar meeting that week.
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 responsibilities:

1) preparation and posting of an agenda of questions to the “Discussion Board” (Pioneerweb) by 9 p.m. Wednesday 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.

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 in class on 10/13.

Final Paper (25%)

Students will write a 10-12 page research paper that develops in more depth a topic that interested them earlier in the term.

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 (though if you can’t get me the hardcopy by the deadline, do email me what you have, then submit hard copy after).

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

*** These marks are included in the syllabus in order to alert you to weeks with heavier reading loads.

Week One

8/31 Introduction

Week Two
9/3 Overview: The History of Indian Religions

9/5 A Religious World of the Senses
read Hawley and Narayan, "Introduction," Chapters 1 and 2

9/7 Beyond the Gods?
read Hopkins, Chapter 1 (HO)

Week Three

9/10 Order
read Hopkins Chapter 2 (HO)

9/12 The Real and the Ideal
read Hawley and Narayan, Chapter 14

9/14 The Sound of Scripture (Seminar)
read Graham, Scripture as Spoken Word (ER)

Week Four *** Ritual

9/17 Living with Manu
read Hopkins, 73-86 (HO)
read Hawley and Narayan, Chapter 4
read Anantha Murthy, Samskara, sections I-IV (pp. 1-36)

9/19 Festivals
read Hawley and Narayan, Chapter 6
read Anantha Murthy, Samskara, sections V-X, (pp. 36-64)

9/21 Samskara Seminar
read until end of Samskara, Afterword is optional

Paper Assignment Handed Out

Week Five

9/24 Moksha
read Hopkins, Chapter 3 (HO)

9/26 Asceticism
read Hawley and Narayan, Chapter 5
9/28 Seminar: Taking Your Body Apart
read Olivelle, “Deconstructing the Body in Indian Asceticism” (E-R)

Paper Due in Class

Week Six
10/1 The Story of the Buddha
read Hopkins, Chapter Four (HO)
Embree “Theravada Buddhism” (ER)
10/3 Jainism
read Embree, “The Basic Doctrines of Jainism” (ER)
10/5 Film (no seminar)

Week Seven
10/8 Krishna’s Life
read Hopkins, Chapter 6 (HO)
read Hawley and Narayan, Chapter 7
10/10 The Buddha in the Gita
read Bhagavad Gita, Introduction and Chapters 1-11
10/12 Seminar
read Bhagavad Gita, Chapters 12-18 (and Afterword)
Take-home Midterm Available

Week Eight ***
10/15 Ramayana Plot and Themes
read R. K. Narayan, The Ramayana, Chapters 1-4
10/17 Variety and Performance
read R. K. Narayan, The Ramayana, Chapters 5-Epilogue
10/19 Seminar: The Living Ramayana
read Hawley and Narayan, Chapter 8
Mid-term Take-home Due in Class

October Break (20-28)
Week Nine

10/29 Bhakti with Form (saguṇa)
read Hopkins, Chapter 7, stop at p. 126, “Devi, Saktas and Tantra” (HO)
read Hawley and Juergensmeyer, Songs of the Saints, “Introduction,” “Mirabai,” “Surdas”
read Mirabai (comic book)

10/31 Bhakti without Form (nirguna)
read Hawley and Juergensmyer, “Ravidas” and “Kabir”

11/2 Seminar: Devotion and the Goddess
read Hopkins, 126-130
read Hawley and Narayan, Chapter 10

Week Ten

11/5 Islam in India
read Gandhi, Revenge and Reconciliation (ER)

11/7 Sufism: Holy Man Islam
read Hawley and Narayan, Chapter 18
read Ernst, Shambala Guide to Sufism (ER)
Chapter 4, “Saints and Sainthood”
Chapter 5, “The Sufi Orders”, up to p. 130

11/9 Seminar The Guru
read Hawley and Juergensmyer, Chapters 11 and 12

Week Eleven

11/12 Sikhism
read Hawley and Juergensymer, Songs of the Saints, “Guru Nanak”

11/14 Sikh Identity and Conflict
read Bhupinder Singh, “Raj Karega Khalsa” (ER)

11/16 Seminar
read Oberoi, The Construction of Religious Boundaries (ER)
chapter four, “The Conservation of Sanatan Tradition”
Week Twelve

11/19 Colony and The Hindu Renaissance
read Hay, “Leaders of Hindu Reform and Revival,” pp. 36-62 (ER)

11/21 No Class

Thanksgiving Holiday

Week Thirteen

11/26 Militant Monks
read Hay, “Shri Ramakrishna,” “Swami Vivekananda” and selection from Anandamatha (ER)
read Chowdhury-Sengupta, “Reconstructing Spiritual Hinduism” (ER)

11/28 The Goddess and Mother India

Film: Father, Son and Holy War
(To be viewed outside class)

11/30 Seminar: Hinduism and Violence
read: Hawley and Narayan, Chapter 17

Week Fourteen

12/3 Gandhi’s Life
read Hay, “Mahatma Gandhi,” pp. 243-274 (ER)

12/5 Gandhi’s Philosophy and Methods
read Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, pp. 3-145, 226-242

12/7 Seminar

Week Fifteen

12/10 Diaspora, Last Class Meeting
read Hawley and Narayan, Chapters 11 and 13

12/11-13 Conferences for Final Paper