Religious Traditions of India

REL 226
T/TH 2:15 PM-4:05 PM
Steiner 106 and Seminar Room (TBA)

Professor Dobe
Office Hours: T/TH 9:30-11:30
Steiner 105
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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 over-view 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 modalities and performances through which the sacred has been and continues to be enacted and constructed throughout South Asian history. These modalities include, among other things, the use of sound, sacrifice, divine embodiment, asceticism, possession, 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)

Amar Citra Katha comics, Mirabai and Kabir.


Recommended for Purchase

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

All other readings will be made available on the course’s Blackboard site under the folder ‘Documents’ and arranged in order according to the weeks of the syllabus. These readings are marked with a (B) in the reading and class schedule below.
Office Hours
Tuesday & Thursday, 9:30-11:30. If you would like to meet with me during office hours, please sign up 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 Thursdays. If these discussions are to be successful, students will need to have carefully read the assigned texts and to have them in hand (including those posted on Blackboard) in class.

Finally, attendance is required at two extra-class activities:

1) Friday, 2/24, 8 p.m. in Sebring-Lewis: Sufi Music Concert

2) Tuesday, 3/7, 7 p.m. (location TBA): Screening of the (3 hr. long) film version of Mahābhārata

And attendance is encouraged but optional at a third event:

3) Friday, 2/24, 4:15-5:30 p. m. in Flanagan black box theater (schedule tentative):
   Session with Pakistani musicians
Mark your calendars now!

Short Response Paper (2-3 pages) (10 %)
Students will be asked to write a short, clearly-focused response paper (due date: 2/10). 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%)**

By the end of the first week, students are required to sign-up in pairs (i.e., two leaders per Thursday) 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 6 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.

**Group Presentations (20%)**

During Week 5 of the class, I will hand out a list of possible themes/topics related to the course from which students will select options according to their interests. (Again, student suggestions on possible topics are welcome, so long as they are shared with the Professor before this time.) Presentation groups will be determined on the basis of student interest and formed by Week 6 of the class. Presentation proposals will be due on 4/7 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)

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**Class and Reading Schedule**
Week One

1/24  Introduction

1/26  *Representing Religion: Hindu-ism or Hindu-ism?*?
    read Flood, Chapter 1
    read Said, ?Orientalism? (B)

Week Two

1/31  *The Roots of Hinduism*
    read Flood, Chapter Two, ?Ancient Origins?
    and Chapter Three, ?Dharma? 

2/2   *The Sound of Scripture (Seminar)*
    read Graham, *Beyond the Written Word* (B)

Week Three

2/7   *Living Ritually*
    read Flood, Chapter Nine, ?Ritual?
    read Anantha Murthy, *Samskāra*

2/9   *Seminar*
    read Anantha Murthy, *Samskāra*

2/10  Paper Due by 3 p.m. to my mailbox in Steiner Main Office

Week Four

2/14  *Moksha*
    read Flood, Chapter 4, ?Yoga and Renunciation?, 75-102
    read Embree, ?The Ultimate Reality in the Upanishads?, pp. 28-39 (B)

    *Recommended reading*
    Flood, Chapter 10, ?Hindu Theology and Philosophy?

2/16  *The World in the Body (Seminar)*
    read Olivelle, ?Deconstructing the Body in Indian Asceticism? (B)
Week Five

2/21 Śramaṇas: Jainism and Buddhism
read Embree, ?The Background of Jainism and Buddhism,? pp. 43-75, 93-114 (B)

2/23 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.)

Selection of Group Presentation Topics due Thursday in class

2/24 Sufi Concert, Sebring-Lewis, 8 p.m. (attendance required)

(In addition to the concert: Informal Performance and Discussion with Musicians, Flanagan Studio, 4:15-5:30 p.m., schedule tentative)(optional)

Week Six

2/28 Library Research Session, Meet with Groups for Presentation Planning
read Narasimhan, The Mahābhārata

3/2 The Mahābhārata (No Seminar, meet in Steiner 106)
read Narasimhan

Week Seven

3/7 The Mahābhārata
read Narasimhan

Night Screening of film version of the Mahābhārata, 7-10 p.m.
(2 hrs. 46 mins.) (attendance required)

3/9 The Mahābhārata (Seminar)
Mid-term Take-home Distributed

Week Eight
3/14  The Goddess among the Gods
read Flood, Chapter 8, ?The Goddess and Śākta Traditions,? pp. 174-197

3/16  Being Possessed  (Seminar)
read Caldwell, ?Bhagavati: Ball of Fire,? pp. 195-226 (B)

3/17  Mid-term Take-home Due by 3 p. m. in mailbox, Steiner Main Office

Second semester recess (3/18 -4/2)

Week Nine

4/4  Bhakti with Form (saguṇa)
read Flood, Chapter 6, ?For the Love of Vishnu?
read Hawley, ?Introduction,? ?Mirabai,? ?Surdas? (B)
read Mīrabai (comic book)

4/6  Bhakti without Form  (Seminar)
read Hawley, ?Kabir? and ?Nanak? (B)
read Kabir (comic book)

4/7  Group Presentation Proposals Due by 3 p.m. in mailbox Steiner Main Office

Week Ten

4/11  Islam in India
read Gandhi, Revenge and Reconciliation (B)
read Ernst, Sufism (B)

4/13  Seminar
read Oberoi, The Construction of Religious Boundaries  (B)

Week Eleven

4/18  The Hindu Renaissance
read Flood, Chapter 11
read Hay, ?Leaders of Hindu Reform and Revival,? pp. 36-83 (B)

4/20  Group Presentation Preparation
Week Twelve

4/25 Gandhi
read Hay, ?Mahatma Gandhi,? pp. 243-274 (B)

4/27 Grasping Hold of Truth (satyāgraha) (Seminar)
read Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, pp. 3-145, 226-242

Week Thirteen

5/2 The Sacred Body of Mother India (Seminar)
read Hay, ?The Marriage of Politics and Religion,? pp. 128-172 and 289-295

5/4 Group Presentations

Week Fourteen

5/9 Group Presentations

5/11 Group Presentations