

Religions of India

Religious Studies 253
DePauw University - Fall 2008
12:30 -1:30 MWF – HH 301

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Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to the many religious traditions which have found a home in India. In this comprehensive introduction we will survey the history, thought, and practices of the major Indian religious traditions in order to come to a better understanding of the ways in which people in South Asia have found meaning and purpose in their lives through religion over several millennia. India (by which we mean not just the present-day nation-state of India but the cultural complex of South Asian civilization from Sri Lanka to Tibet and from Afghanistan to Myanmar from 2500 BCE to the present) gave birth to the three great religious traditions which now blanket Asia: *Hinduism* in modern-day India, Nepal, and Indonesia; *Theravada Buddhism* in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia and Laos; and *Mahayana Buddhism* in Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. So too, the religions of *Jainism* and *Sikhism* were born on Indian soil. And in the present day, the majority of the world's Muslims live in South Asia, thus making *Islam* a thoroughly 'Indian' religion by adoption. In this introductory class we will concentrate on the practices and worldviews of Indian religions – classical and modern.

Requirements:

Class-time will be devoted to a mixture of lecture and open discussion. This class is to be a shared learning experience. In other words, I expect to learn from your insights as well as share my own. In order for this class to be both fun and productive for us all, students will be expected to familiarize themselves with *all* material covered in the assigned readings. For students to fully comprehend lectures and participate meaningfully in discussions reading assignments should be read before class. As class participation makes up a significant portion of the final grade it will not be acceptable to delay reading until exam time or remain silent during discussion sections. In order to promote a communal learning experience student "volunteers" may be assigned to lead the discussion groups for particular classes. 50% of the grade will be based upon a midterm (25%) and final (25%) for the course. In addition 30% of the grade will be based upon a few short written assignments (reflection papers) of three to four pages. The remaining 20% of the grade will be based upon class participation.

Grading Considerations:

Papers:

Ensure that you have a clear **thesis**, i.e., the topic statement of a meaningful, interesting argument in which you **demonstrate** something, not merely **describe** it.

'C' range: This paper meets the basic requirements of the assignment: it offers a thesis of some kind, it refers to some evidence to support its thesis, and it presents a few points in service of its argument. Any paper will fall *below* a 'C' if it lacks one or more of these features.

'B' range: This paper's thesis is clear; the argument is unified and coherent, with appropriate evidence in support of its points. The argument shows comprehension of the material and manifests critical thinking about the issues raised in the course. The paper is well written and carefully proofread.

'A' range: This paper is outstanding in form and content. The thesis is clear and insightful; it is original, or it expands in a new way on ideas presented in the course. The evidence presented in support of the argument is carefully chosen and deftly handled. The argument is not only unified and coherent, but also complex and nuanced.

Class Participation:

'C' range: The student meets the basic requirements of participation. This student is usually prepared and participates once in a while but not regularly. This student's contributions relate to the texts and the lectures and offer a few insightful ideas, but do not facilitate a discussion. Failure to fulfill satisfactorily any of these criteria will result in a grade *below* a 'C'.

'B' range: This student participates consistently in discussion. This student comes to class well prepared and contributes quite regularly by sharing thoughts and questions that show insight and a familiarity with the material. This student refers to the materials discussed in lecture and shows interest in other students' contributions.

'A' range: This student is fully engaged and highly motivated. This student is well prepared, having read the assigned texts, and has thought carefully about the texts' relation to issues raised in class. This student's ideas and questions are substantive (either constructive or critical); they stimulate class discussions. This student listens and responds to the contributions of other students.

Attendance at all sessions is expected.

***Notice about deadlines:** To keep the class on pace throughout the semester, the assignment deadlines will be strictly enforced. Late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 3% per day.

Grade distribution: Class Participation: 20%; Reflection Papers 30%; Midterm Exam 25%; Final Exam: 25%

Academic Integrity Policy

It goes without saying that students will be expected to live up to the highest standards of academic integrity in this course. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Please re-read the section on academic integrity in your *Student Handbook* or come and see me if you have any questions in this regard.

Required Books:

John M. Koller, *The Indian Way* (MacMillan, 1982)
Ainslee Embree, ed. *Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. 1* (Columbia University Press, 1988)
Barbara Miller, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita* (Bantam, 1986)
Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, eds. and trans. *Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal* (Signet Classics, 2002)
Padma Sambhava (trans. by Robert Thurman), *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Bantam, 1994)
Karen Armstrong, *Buddha*, (Penguin, 2004)

Week 1 (August 27, 29)

The Indus Valley Civilization and the Roots of Indian Religion

August 27 – Introductory Remarks

August 29 – Introduction: Diversity, Change and Continuity, -- Koller, pp. 1-18

Week 2 (September 1, 3, 5)

Vedic Religion

September 1 – Roots of the Indian Way -- Koller, pp. 19-37

September 3 – Creation and Celebration in the Vedas -- Koller, pp. 38-55

September 5 – Cosmic and Ritual Order -- Embree, pp. 1-28

Week 3 (September 8, 10, 12)

The Religious World of the Upanishadic Sages

September 8 – Liberating Knowledge -- Koller, pp. 56-78

September 10 – Ultimate Reality -- *Upanishads*, pp. 13-48

September 12 – Consciousness and the Self – *Upanishads*, pp. 49-116

Week 4 (September 15, 17, 19)

Jainism

September 15 – The Jaina Vision -- Koller, pp. 105-127

September 17 – Basic Doctrines of Jainism -- Embree, pp. 41-75

September 19 – Jain Philosophy and Political Thought -- Embree, pp. 76-92

Week 5 (September 22, 24, 26)

The Life of the Buddha

September 22 – Armstrong, pp. 1-65

September 24 – Armstrong, pp. 66-121

September 26 – Armstrong, pp. 122-187

Week 6 (September 29 and October 1, 3)

Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism

September 29 – The Way of the Buddha -- Koller, pp. 128-162

October 1 – Basic Doctrines, Ethics and Politics -- Embree, pp. 93-152

October 3 – The Great Vehicle -- Embree, pp. 153-187

Week 7 (October 6, 8, 10)

Classical Hinduism (Varnasrama Dharma)

October 6 – Self and Society: Norms of Life -- Koller, pp. 79-104

October 8 – Dharma and Artha -- Embree, pp. 201-253

October 10 – Kama and Moksha -- Embree, pp. 254-295

Week 8 (October 13, 15, 17)

October 13 – Stations of Life: *The Fourth Stage*

October 15 – Midterm Review

October 17 - MIDTERM EXAM

Week 9 (October 20, 22, 24)

NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

Week 10 (October 27, 29, 31)

Devotional Hinduism I

October 27 – The Bhagavad Gita -- Koller, pp. 179-200

October 29 - *Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 21-90

October 31 – *Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 91-146

Week 11 (November 3, 5, 7) No class Nov. 3 – Instructor at AAR Conference in Chicago.

Devotional Hinduism II

November 5 – Vishnu, Kali and Shiva -- Koller, pp. 201-240

November 7 – Songs of Medieval Hindu Devotion -- Embree, pp. 342-378

Week 12 (November 10, 12, 14)

Indian Philosophy: Epistemology and Metaphysics

November 10 – Yoga -- Koller, pp. 163-178

November 12 – Bondage, Liberation and Causality -- Koller, pp. 241-264

November 14 – Knowledge and Reality -- Koller, pp. 265-285

Week 13 (November 17, 19, 21)

Islam in India

November 17 – Primary Tenets of Islam -- Koller, pp. 286-308

November 19 – The Coming of Islam to India -- Embree, pp. 383-407

November 21 – The Muslim Ruler in India -- Embree, pp. 408-446

Week 14 (November 24)

Islam in India – Concluding Remarks

November 24 – Islamic Mysticism -- Embree, pp. 447-490

November 26 - NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 28 – NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15 (December 1, 3, 5)

Sikhism

December 1 – The Faith of the Sikhs -- Koller, pp. 309-327

December 3 – Belief and Practice -- Embree, pp. 491-510

December 5 - Guru Granth Saheb at <<http://www.sikhs.org/english/frame.html>>

Week 16 (December 8, 10, 12)

Tibetan Buddhism

December 8 – The Thunderbolt Vehicle -- Embree, pp. 188-200

December 10 – *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, pp. 5-50

December 10 – *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, pp. 51-91

Week 17 (December 15, 17, 19)

FINAL EXAM WEEK