

RLST 2120: Hinduism: A Textual Approach

(Satisfies “Texts” and “Traditions” requirements)



Spring 2009 TTH 10:00-11:15 CC 5

Instructor: Dr. Lola Williamson

Office: Christian Center 10

Office Hours: MW 10-11

Email: willill@millsaps.edu

Phone: 601-974-1333

Website: <http://home.millsaps.edu/willill>

Hinduism is the oldest continuous religious tradition in the world. This course will look at texts and images Hindus have turned to for inspiration over the years—from the ancient Vedas to the Puranas ("old stories") to contemporary comic books, films, and television series. We will explore how the Hindu tradition circulates symbols and transmits religion through scriptures, stories, dance, painting, sculpture, and new communication media.

Texts

Hinduism: A Reader edited by Deepak Sarma, 2008 (*Reader* in schedule).

Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction by Kim Knott, 1998 (*Hinduism* in schedule).

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali translated by Sri Swami Satchidananda, 1990.

Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia edited by Lawrence Babb and Susan Wadley, 1995. (*Media* in schedule).

Additional articles listed in course schedule below.

Films

Water directed by Mehta Deepa

Selections from several TV and film versions of the *Ramayana*

Selections from *The Mahabharata* directed by Peter Brook

Kalyug directed by Shyam Benegal

Selections from BBC's *The Story of India*

Attendance

You are expected to attend all classes. If you miss a class due to illness, family crisis, religious holiday, or Millsaps-sponsored travel, please inform me of the reason for your absence. More than two unexcused absences will affect your final grade. If you miss ten or more classes (about a third of the semester) for any reason, you should withdraw from the course to avoid receiving an F. If the absences occur after the final day to withdraw without a grade (March 30), you should make arrangements for a medical withdrawal in order to avoid receiving an F.

Grading Scale

A (93-100) A- (90-92) B+ (87-89) B (83-86) B- (80-82) C+ (77-79) C (73-76) C- (70-72) D+ (67-69) D (63-66) D- (60-62) F (0-59)

Disability Accommodations

If you have any needs or require accommodations related to a disability, please contact Patrick Cooper to register for disability services. You can reach him via e-mail at coopeap@millsaps.edu or by calling extension 1228. Accommodations will not be granted until a meeting with Patrick has taken place each semester and letters have been received by your instructor.

Course Evaluation

- 20% Exam
- 10% Two-page religious site report
- 30% Three 3-4 page essays (10% each)
- 10% Media and cultural performance project (possible topics: “Hinduism and” poster art; comic books; film; internet; music; dance, etc.)
- 30% 10-page research paper (10%: prospectus, bibliography, and journal response paper; 20%: paper)

Requirement Descriptions

Weekly readings

Come to class prepared to discuss the material listed in the class schedule. I will often send you questions to consider by email. It will come with a “high importance” alert and the subject line will say “Hinduism.” DON’T DELETE IT. Print the questions and jot down notes and ideas to bring with you to class.

Exam

This will be in-class and will cover basic terminology and facts, as well as major themes and ideas. The former will be tested through objective questions and the latter through essay questions. At the end of each unit, you will write two essay questions to hand in. I will choose some of these, compile them, and give them back to you to use as a study guide. Three of them will be on the exam.

Religious Site Report

You may visit one of the three Hindu temples in the Jackson area, or you may attend a Hindu religious event in a community center or home. (I will announce events as I learn of them.) Begin by giving specific field information: name and address of site, occasion, and time of visit. Then describe the building, inside and out, and the people (average ages, genders, etc.) Describe what happens from beginning to end, including a discussion of the “tone.” Was it casual or formal, emotional or reserved, spontaneous or ritualized? The largest part of the paper will be devoted to analysis. You might consider, for example, a particular message or teaching that was conveyed, the nature of the worship, or the leader/group dynamic. This may be handed in any time before April 14.

Essays

These three essays will explore material covered in class. They are to be “position papers,” which means that you will take a stance on an issue and try to convince the reader of your position. The broad topics are listed in the class schedule; the specific topic is up to you.

Media and Cultural Performance Project

These will be presentations that will include sample film or music clips, dance performances, or whatever your group chooses. You will work in pairs and will have 20 - 25 minutes for the presentation. Each student is to hand in a one-page summary of the project that will include a bibliography of sources, including a list of the films, etc. Web sources are fine for this. An outline of the presentation is the second item to be included. These two will be the same for both presenters. The third item is a list of your contribution to the project. This part will obviously be different for each.

Research Paper

This counts as a major portion of your grade, which means that I expect you to put ample time and effort into it. Please note that if you are counting this course toward a Film Studies minor, your research paper must address a question about film and Hinduism. Note that if you are taking Comprehensive Exams, you may want to prepare your bibliography and journal response over the spring break or even before.

Prospectus: In this one-two page paper, you will discuss your research question and pose several possible answers. You should also present some general background on the topic, and discuss why it interests you. You don't have to do in-depth research for the prospectus, but you should have checked available sources to make sure you can answer your question. As soon as your topic is approved, begin to collect your materials. This will give you time to order material through interlibrary loan, which may take several weeks to receive.

Bibliography: You must hand in your bibliography five weeks before your paper is due. This will assure that you have time to peruse the material thoughtfully. Your bibliography must contain a minimum of six sources. At least one should be a primary source. For example, if you are writing about Dalits, you should include an essay or piece of artwork that a Dalit has produced.

Journal response paper: At least one source will be a peer-reviewed journal article that examines questions closely related to your own. A two-page analysis of the author's arguments is due on April 2.

Class Schedule

Note that the schedule may need to be adjusted during the course of the semester. Taking notes on the material and writing questions or thoughts you have about the reading is a good way to prepare for class. Always bring the text we will be discussing to class.

Week 1

Jan. 13 Overview of course; folk stories

Jan. 15 How Do We Study Hinduism? *Hinduism*, Ch. 1, 2, 6, and 9

Week 2

Jan. 20 Who Defines Hinduism? *Reader*, Ch. 14 and 15; *Media*, Ch. 1 (a lot of reading; make sure you leave enough time for it!)

Jan. 22 Historical Foundations (Indus Valley and Vedic Civilizations) *Reader*, Ch. 1; <http://www.harappa.com/har/har0.html> Intro (4-page summary), II, III, and IV. You don't have to follow links, unless you want to.

Week 3

Jan. 27 Rituals and Laws: *Reader*, Ch. 3, 9 (only 222 up to "Marriage" on 239 and 249 up to "Women" on 252), and 16

Hand in two possible essay questions on defining Hinduism and historical foundations for exam.

Jan. 29 Dalits: *Hinduism*, 88-93; *Reader*, Ch. 12

Week 4

Feb. 3 Women: *Hinduism*, 80-88; *Reader*, Ch. 9 (only 239-242 and 253-254); 11, and 13 (Chapter 10 provides additional optional reading.)

Feb. 5 **Essay One due** (Topic: an aspect of social structure) FILM: *Water*

Week 5

Feb. 10 Upanishads: *Reader*, Ch. 2

Hand in two possible essay questions on rituals and social structure for exam.

Feb. 12 Vedanta: *Hinduism*, Ch. 3; Shankara (emailed); Vivekananda (emailed)

Week 6

Feb. 16 **Annual Lecture on Indian Culture and Religion**

7:00 Recital Hall; Dr. Sushil Mittal: "It's Time to Be Realistic about Nonviolence in a Violent World: A Gandhian Perspective."

Feb. 17 Guest speaker: Dr. Sushil Mittal: "Why it's So Hard to Define Hinduism"

Feb. 19 Mahabharata: *Reader*, Ch. 4; *Hinduism*, Ch. 4; FILM: *Mahabharat* directed by Peter Brook

Week 7

Feb. 24 Ramayana: *Reader*, Ch. 6; **research paper prospectus due**

Feb. 26 Puranas: *Reader*, Ch. 7; *Hinduism*, Ch. 5

(Feb. 27: Midterm Grades reported)

Week 8

- Mar. 3 Two Krishnas: Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavata Purana: Reader, Ch. 5 and 8
Hand in two possible essay questions on devotional literature for exam.
- Mar. 5 **Essay Two due** (Topic: an aspect of devotional literature)
FILM: *Kalyug* (1980) directed by Shyam Benegal (explores
Mahabharata's Karna in modern setting)
- Week 9**
- Mar. 10 God Posters: *Media*, Ch. 2 and 3
- Mar. 12 **EXAM**
- Mar. 17 & 19: Spring Break
- Week 10** (Comprehensive Exams: March 23 – April 2)
- Mar. 24 Hinduism and Comic Books: *Media*, Ch. 4 and 5
- Mar. 26 Hinduism in TV and Film: *Media*, Ch. 9 and 10; **research bibliography due**
- (Mar. 31: Last day to withdraw with grade of W)
- Week 11**
- Mar. 31 *Yoga Sutra*
- Apr. 2 *Yoga Sutra*; **Journal reading response paper due**
- Week 12**
- Apr. 7 *Yoga Sutra* and class evaluations
- Apr. 9 **Essay Three due** (Topic: *Yoga Sutra*) FILM: BBC's *The Story of India*
- Week 13**
- Apr. 14 Hinduism beyond India: *Hinduism*, Ch. 8; "The Changing Face of Hinduism in Jackson, Mississippi" by Dr. Roy and yours truly (emailed); discuss religious site visits; **last day to hand in site visit paper**
- Apr. 16 Gurus in America; "What Are Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements?" by yours truly (emailed); Documentaries (Ammachi, TM, etc.)
- Week 14**
- Apr. 21 **Media and cultural performance projects**
- Apr. 23 **Media and cultural performance projects**
- FINALS**
- Apr. 30 **Research Paper Due by 4:00 p.m.**