

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 2610

RELIGIONS OF INDIA

Monday and Wednesday 12:00 -12:50 pm; plus a one hour recitation each week.

Instructor: Professor Biernacki

Office hours: Wednesday: 1-2:30 and by appointment; 735-4730;
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This course will focus on a variety of religious traditions found in India--Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and on the interplay they have with one another. We will look at some of the ancient beliefs of Indian culture and also at how these beliefs have evolved and adapted to a changing society. We will also address some traditional Indian concepts, dharma, karma and rebirth, for instance, and how their religious expressions both contribute to and undermine the social order.

Texts:

Biernacki, *Renowned Goddess of Desire*

Miller, *Bhagavad Gita*

Narayan, *Gods, Demons and Others*

Goals for the class:

This class is designed to:

- 1) Give you familiarity with some of the focal ideas of Indian religions
- 2) Give you familiarity with some of the most important deities
- 3) Give you the chance to think about some very interesting ideas
- 4) Practice putting your ideas on paper.
- 5) Provide a sense of enjoyment and appreciation for cultures different from your own
- 6) Give you the opportunity to apply and analyze what you've learned to a related context of your own choosing

The lectures will only occasionally cover material already covered in the readings. However, there will be time devoted during recitations for you to ask questions about the readings.

Requirements and Grading:

- Class participation is 14% of the grade; this includes attendance.
- **No Computers needed during class.** 6 % Points for learning how to be a human being who is not a cyborg and computer-cellphone-ipad-free for the short period of classtime—Except on Friday, when we go over readings, some of which are online. Be sure not to text message during class, (or at least make sure to not be noticed because this will dramatically bring down your grade.) Turn off cell phones and

keep them out of sight. You can miss 3 classes for any reason whatsoever ("I had to go snowboarding to celebrate my best friend turning 21"); no questions asked.

After that your total grade begins to drop if the absence is not justified by a doctor's excuse. Attendance is worth 1 point off for each class missed.

- **Bring your book of the week's reading to Friday's class**, because you will want to use your reading at times during Friday discussions of the reading- 2%. The class notes are available on a website and can be printed out before class or after class and will be on a powerpoint on D2L.
- Weekly reading quiz on Fridays. 5 True/False questions. $2.5\% \times 12 = 30\%$
- Handing in the 1-2 page weekly recitation assignments is 18% (3% for each assignment) of your grade. The point of this assignment is to help you to digest the week's readings. **These papers should have a minimum of 2 places where you directly reference what you read for that week, giving a page number citation.** You don't have to hand in an assignment every week; you can do this assignment every other week during the course of the semester. These should be *typed* and handed in on Fridays; they can be handed in early, however, a late assignment or a non-typed assignment can't be accepted. Be sure to meet the deadlines listed in the syllabus for each paper.
- Journal of your reflections on in-class praticum contemplative exercises based on week's readings of the particular traditions we study- 500 words— $2 \times 3\% = 6\%$. This is based on your own experience, in your own words.
- Final exam- 24%

Readings:

n.b. all weekly assignments due at the beginning of recitation

Week 1 Introduction to the course

Week 2 Where is India?

Assignment: read: Eck, *Darshan*, p.1-31; Oxtoby, p.13-16 (on website reading list).

Weekly response paper (wrp): answer the following questions and hand in at recitation: what is Darshan? What role does the visual play in India? What differences do you see in approaches to culture between India and America?

Week 3 Ancient Indus Civilization, Vedas and Upanishads

Assignment: read: Olivelle (on the website reading list); Oxtoby, p.16-32 (on website reading list).

Wrps: : answer the following questions and hand in at recitation: How was the world created according to the Vedic hymn "Purusha Sukta," Rg Veda 10.90, and Rg Veda hymn 10.129? What are three themes that you see in these hymns from the Vedas? How similar and how different is the world view you see in the Vedas compared to our contemporary society? Also, what is the meaning of "tat tvam asi" "You are that!" (or "that art thou", or "that is how you are") taken from the Upanishad reading. Answer the following questions: How can the Self be that about which Aruni says "you are that"

("that's how you are" in your text) *and* which Yajnavalkya says "not--- not---" ("neti, neti")? Who is Raikva? Who is the gatherer according to Raikva?

Paper #1 due.

Week 4 Jainism

Assignment: read: Oxtoby, p. 161-195, (on website reading list).

Wrp: who is Mahavira? what is a tirthankara? what are the 5 practices of Jainism?

What is sallekhana? what do you think about the Jain practice of ahimsa (non-harming)

Week 5 Buddhism

Assignment: read: Oxtoby, p. 212-229; 232-242, Ling, "The Buddha's Philosophy of Man" (on website reading list).

Wrp: write about the Four Noble Truths describing the doctrine of anatman. What is dependent origination?

Paper #2 due.

Week 6 Bhagavad Gita

Assignment: read: Oxtoby, p.32-39 (on website reading list); Miller, *Bhagavad Gita*, read through the 10th teaching, p. 20-95; *optional:* introduction, p. 1-18.

Wrp: What are the different the different paths to salvation outlined in the *Bhagavad Gita*? Try to name four different paths. (It's possible to come up with more than four). Discuss and compare these paths, highlighting what skills it would take to be successful in one path or another.

Week 7 Karma and Dharma

Assignment: read: finish the Bhagavad Gita

Wrp: How does Krishna eventually convince Arjuna to fight? What is the field and the knower of the field? Discuss the role of the self in the teachings of Krishna; what are the different components and qualities of the individual self? How does the way Krishna talks about the individual compare to what you saw in the Upanishads?.

Paper #3 due.

Week 8 Bhakti

Assignment: read: Oxtoby, p.63-67 (on website reading list)., Hawley and Hess (on the website reading list)

Wrp: Which Gods do the poets you're reading, Mirabai and Kabir each worship? What themes do they talk about in their poetry? How do each relate to God? Which is your favorite poem and what is it that you like about it? Assignments this week are due the following week

Week 9 Deity in India

Assignment: read: Oxtoby, p.39-45, (on website reading list).; Narayan, *Gods, Demons and Others* 1st half

Wrp: What happens to Chudala and what happens to Lavana? What caste do these two belong to? What is the story of Visvamitra? Who is Manmata? What happens to him?

Book review due
Paper #4 due.

Week 10 Deity in India

Assignment: read: Biernacki p.131-141, Finish Narayan, *Gods, Demons and Others*

Wrp: How do the various Gods differ from each other? How does skin color play in the identity of the Blue Goddess of Speech? Also through searching on the internet, identify one form of a Hindu Deity, one form of a Buddhist deity or bodhisattva, and one form of a Jain Tirthankara, writing one paragraph about each of these, noting differences and similarities in the stories about them with the stories you read this week.

Week 11- Gender

Assignment: read: Biernacki p. 29-60; p.111-130

Wrp: What is the "Kali Practice"? How do women figure in the caste system? What different roles can women take in Tantra? What are mantras? What different connections do women have with mantras and speech in your reading this week?

Paper #5 due.

Week 12 Tantra

Assignment: read: Biernacki p.61-91; p. 193-217

Wrp: What does Vasishta's education entail? How does this Vasishta compare to the Vasishta you read about in week 10? What is the secret of the sex rite? What types of details do we find in a Tantric text? List five different types of subject matter that you notice in the synopsis of the *Great Blue Tantra*. Who wrote the *Great Blue Tantra*? (hint: trick question). Describe three or more elements in the visualization of the Blue Goddess of Speech.

Week 13 Sikhism

Assignment: read: Oxtoby, p. 127-157 (on website reading list)

Wrp: What are the main tenants of Sikhism? What are the meanings of the word "guru" for Sikhism? How did the political scene in India affect the development of Sikhism? How does the writing of Guru Nanak compare with your readings of Kabir?

Journal Reflection due.

Week 14 – Fall Break

Week 15 Buddhism

Assignment: read: Oxtoby, p. 243-250; Nagarjuna, (on website reading list)

Wrp: outline and then compare the tenets of Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, comparing the two, including which elements of each you think serves best to fulfil the Buddhist goal of nirvana and how it does so. How does the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna analyze motion? The senses? The elements? What do you think emptiness is according to Nagarjuna?

Paper #6 due.

Week 16 In a Contemporary Light and Review

Assignment: read: Oxtoby, p. 294-296; Oxtoby, p. 67-71; Oxtoby, p. 104-106; Chakravarti (on website reading list)

Wrp: What are some modern movements in Hinduism? Who is Ramakrishna? Who is Anandamayi Ma? Who is Tenzin Gyatso? What do you think of Shree Chakravarti's life, religious expression and spirituality as expressed in her biography?

Final Exam Friday Week 16

If you know that you don't take exams well, it is possible to talk to the Professor to arrange to write a 15 page paper on a topic to be mutually decided, and to be worth 15% of your final grade. The final exam would only count for 10% of your final grade. The cut off date for this decision is week 8. The instructor reserves the right to alter this syllabus at any time throughout the course and it is the responsibility of the student to incorporate and fulfil any new requirements made.