

SYLLABUS

REL 230 *South Asian Religions*

Berea College
Fall 2002
MWF 9
Draper 215

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Preliminary Pedagogical Comments

Institution: Private liberal arts college
Course level/type: yr. 2/lecture-seminar
Hours of Instruction: 3 hrs/week over a 14 week term
Enrollment/year last taught: 13 students/2002

Reflections:

This course adopts an area studies approach to the introduction of traditional religious materials from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Himalayan regions). It prioritizes excerpts from primary texts over textbook overviews, with lectures complementing textbook assignments and preparing the way for seminar discussions of primary texts.

Whenever possible, elective opportunities to visit neighboring South Asian religious institutions and relevant museum collections are made available. This always is a popular element in the course, although the entire class never elects to participate as a whole on any single occasion.

The "question of balance" (to quote Ronald Eyre in "The Long Search") for me in this course always is whether and how to complement literate traditions with elements of practice -- to breathe ritual life into the classical texts, and vice versa. Generally, I have found that students respond best to straightforward moral teachings (such as those found in Buddhist jataka literature), mystical musings (such as much early Sikh material), and hagiographical accounts (such as biographies of gurus and lamas). Both the complex philosophical material and anthropologically rich ritual practices that South Asian religions have to offer tend to bewilder most students, in my experience.

Course Content

The better part of our time in this course will be spent in **reading, interpreting, and discussing excerpts from primary texts** (original writings) of **South Asian religious traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, and Sikhism**. Classroom lectures, textbook overviews, and glimpses into these religious worlds through music and video will guide and enrich our conversations about these traditions. This combination of **intensive reading and discussion** along with **lectures and multimedia presentations** will enable us to discover for ourselves **what South Asians have valued most throughout the ages**. This, in turn, is an excellent way of determining **what we ourselves have valued and will value**.

Course Goals

- A basic **acquaintance** with the **Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, and Sikh** religious traditions
- A basic **appreciation** of the **interactions between cumulative tradition and personal faith**
- A basic **competence** in **speaking, listening, reading, and writing about primary texts**



Course Materials (for sale at Berea College Bookstore)

- Embree & Hay, eds., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. I (Columbia University Press, 1988)
- John Y. Fenton, et al, *Religions of Asia*, 3rd ed. (Bedford, 1993)
- Mohandas Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers* (Continuum, 1980)
- Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Religions of Tibet in Practice* (Princeton University Press, 1997)
- Gita Mehta, *A River Sutra* (Talese/Doubleday, 1993)



Course Requirements

- **Informed participation in class discussions.** This consists of preparing for class by reading the assigned texts thoughtfully, preparing questions and comments to share in class, bringing the assigned texts to class with you, and responding to questions and comments from the instructor and fellow students in a respectful and cooperative fashion.
- **Helping to maintain a learning-centered and civil classroom community** by minimizing distractions (e.g., making sure cell phones are turned off before entering the classroom; using laptop computers only for non-networked, offline note-taking purposes) and observing common courtesies (e.g., allowing others to complete their thoughts or make their points before offering your own; avoiding attacks on others' character or intelligence in criticizing their comments) in classroom discourse and other activities.
- **Submission of weekly e-mailed responses to assigned readings**, due by 8 a.m. on the dates indicated in the *Course Calendar*, and consisting of questions and concerns raised for you by each week's assigned readings. The text of each e-mailed response should be no less than 250 words, and should be composed in clear standard English prose without any mechanical errors. These responses will be graded pass/fail, and cannot be made up a later time or date.
- **Completion of 1 midterm examination**, to be administered in class on Friday, October 18. Further guidelines for this examination will be distributed in advance of October 18.
- **Completion of 1 documented, scholarly essay (7-10 pages in length)**, which must be submitted in class between October 21 and December 4. Further guidelines for this essay will be distributed in advance of October 21.
- **Completion of 1 final examination**, to be administered in Draper 215 on Wednesday, December 11 at 10 a.m. Further guidelines for this examination will be distributed in advance of December 11.
- **Maintaining your personal integrity** by avoiding plagiarism (representing another's work as your own), cheating (altering the conditions of an examination to create unfair personal advantage), and other forms of academic dishonesty. The instructor reserves the right to reject any work that he deems to have been tainted by such dishonesty and to file the appropriate report with the Associate Provost for Academic Services. For more information on how to avoid plagiarism, see *The B.C. Student Success Manual*, pp. 23-24 ("Avoiding Plagiarism (Thought Theft)," by Patricia Wilson).

Course Evaluation

Class participation.....20% of final grade
 Weekly reading responses.....20% of final grade
 Midterm examination.....20% of final grade
 Scholarly essay.....20% of final grade
 Final examination.....20% of final grade

- A** = consistently outstanding achievement in the course
- B** = work of good to very good quality, but not consistently outstanding
- C** = acceptable level of competence and basic understanding of material
- D** = minimally adequate; student may not be ready for further related coursework
- F** = unsatisfactory and unworthy of credit



Course Attendance

- You are expected to attend every scheduled class session in its entirety – from beginning to end – except in cases in which advance permission to be absent has been sought and obtained by you from the instructor.
- While there is no official penalty for unexcused absences, students who are absent on even an occasional basis will find that the quality of written and in-class work will suffer noticeably; students who are absent on a regular basis are likely to perform poorly in the course overall, and may earn a failing grade.

Course Calendar

Assignments and dates may be subject to change. You are responsible for all changes made to the calendar as provided by the instructor during class sessions.

Week 1	<i>Introduction to South Asian Religions</i>
8/28	Introductory session (no preparation required)
8/30	<u>Video: 330 Million Gods</u> (in class)

Week 2 **Hindu Spirituality I: Vedic Roots and Branches**

- 9/2 *Religions of Asia*, chs. 1 & 2
9/4 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 3-19
9/6 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 19-28

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

Week 3 **Hindu Spirituality II: Upanishadic Teachings**

- 9/9 *Religions of Asia*, ch. 3
9/11 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 29-33
9/13 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 33-39

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

Week 4 **Jain Spirituality**

- 9/16 *Religions of Asia*, pp. 89-93; *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 49-57
9/18 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 58-75
9/20 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 76-92

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

Week 5 **Buddhist Spirituality I: Theravada Traditions**

- 9/23 *Religions of Asia*, ch. 7
9/25 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 100-113, 115-120, 141-149
9/27 Video: *Footprint of the Buddha* (in class)

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

Week 6 **Buddhist Spirituality II: Mahayana Traditions**

- 9/30 *Religions of Asia*, ch. 8
10/2 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 160-170
10/4 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 172-179

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

Week 7 **Buddhist Spirituality III: Vajrayana Traditions**

- 10/7 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 188-199; *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, pp. 3-36
10/9 **NO CLASS – MOUNTAIN DAY**
10/11 *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, pp. 421-441, 458-493

Week 8 **Buddhist Spirituality III: Vajrayana Traditions (cont'd.) / MIDTERM**

- 10/14 **NO CLASS – MIDTERM READING PERIOD**
10/16 *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, pp. 212-222, 355-368, 376-386
Video: *Compassion in Exile* (in class)
10/18 **MIDTERM EXAMINATION** (in class)

Week 9 **Hindu Spirituality III: Bhakti Traditions**

- 10/21 *Religions of Asia*, ch. 4 * scholarly essays may be submitted from now through 12/4 *
10/23 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 281-296
10/25 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 345-371

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

Week 10 ***Islamic Spirituality I: Indian Islamic Orthodoxy***

10/28 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 381-407

10/30 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 408-416, 430-436, 437-446

11/1 Video: *The Five Pillars of Islam* (in class)

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

Week 11 ***Islamic Spirituality II: Indian Islamic Mysticism***

11/4 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 447-461

11/6 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 461-475

11/8 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 475-489

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

Week 12 ***Sikh Spirituality***

11/11 *Religions of Asia*, pp. 94-99; *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 493-500

11/13 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 501-509

11/15 Video: *The Golden Temple* (in class)

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

Week 13 ***Hindu Spirituality IV: Gandhi's Conservative Radicalism***

11/18 *Religions of Asia*, ch. 5

All Men Are Brothers, pp. 3-50

11/20 *All Men Are Brothers*, pp. 51-73, 98-106, 113-117

READING RESPONSE DUE BY 8 A.M.!

11/22 **NO CLASS – INSTRUCTOR AWAY**

**NOVEMBER 25, 27, 29: NO CLASS MEETINGS
(INSTRUCTOR AWAY/THANKSGIVING)**

Week 14 ***South Asian Religions in Literature: A River Sutra*** (Gita Mehta, 1993)

12/2 *A River Sutra* (entire novel)

12/4 Concluding conversations

*** last date on which scholarly essays will be accepted ***

12/6 **NO CLASS – READING PERIOD**

FINAL EXAMINATION: Wednesday, December 11 10 a.m. Draper 215