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Ritual and the Arts in Asian Religions

Instructor

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Institution

Wilfrid Laurier University
 Provincial University; enrolment: 6000 undergraduates, 1000 graduates

Course Description

In this course we will explore how Hindus, Buddhists and others have expressed their understanding of the nature, meaning and goal of human existence in stories, architecture and ritual. Our approach will be visual: through slides, films and videos that represent selected themes and illustrate characteristic features of the Indian world-view.

For Indians, sacred art is not a serious or solemn affair. It is entertaining, aesthetically pleasing, humorous, sensuous, and even erotic. Myths, symbols and ritual performance provide a veritable feast for the senses, and in turn, express religious sentiments. We will look at the humor, sensuality and aesthetics of religious expression in the Indian subcontinent, to see what they tell us about Indian life. We will also examine the place of art and ritual in the Indian political world, both past and present.

Textbooks

Required:

- Wendy O'Flaherty, [Hindu Myths](#); required textbook.
- Richard Lannoy, [The Speaking Tree](#); required textbook.
- [RE. 246 Anthology](#)

Recommended:

- John Fenton, et al., [Religions of Asia](#); background reading on Asian religions.

Background reading:

This course has no prerequisites, but some general knowledge about Hinduism and Buddhism will help you better understand and absorb the material. Material from Lannoy's [The Speaking Tree](#) will be assigned to provide you with some background to Indian culture and society. Lannoy also has several chapters on Indian art that you will be required to read.

Other background reading that I recommend includes the chapters on Hinduism and Buddhism in Fenton, [Religions of Asia](#), David Kinsley's [Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective](#), [Chris Fuller, A Camphor Flame, or](#)

any other good introductory work on the religions of India. These works I've recommended are quite readable and will provide you with a good introduction to Indian tradition. They should be available in the bookstore.

Required reading:

For the first three to four weeks we will be discussing some of the material in O'Flaherty, Hindu Myths. You will receive reading assignments for each class. Please be prepared to discuss the assigned material.

I would also like you to begin reading Lannoy's work. One of your assignments is based on material from Lannoy. Please plan to have Lannoy's work finished by the Thanksgiving holiday.

We will then turn to material from the anthology. Some of these articles are introductory; some are more difficult. Please do the assigned readings. We will go over the material in class sessions.

Works on Indian Art and Architecture

The following is a brief list of general text books on Indian art. Again, many are out of print, and our library does not have them all. But other university libraries do, and I encourage you to look at these sources.

Auboyer, Jeannine. Introduction a l'etude de l'Art de l'Inde. Roma, Institute Italiano per il Medi ed Estremo Oriente. 1965.

_____. Daily Life in Ancient India. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London. 1965.

Brown, Percy. Indian Architecture, 5th edition. D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., Bombay. 1965.

Bussagli, Mario and Sivaramamurti. 5000 Years of the Art of India. Harry N. Abrams and Tulsi Shah Enterprises, Bombay. n.d.

Coomaraswamy, Ananda K.K. History of Indian and Indonesian Art. Dover. 1965.

Craven, Roy. A Concise History of Indian Art.

Kramrish, Stella. The Art of India Through the Ages. Orient Langman, Delhi. 1973.

_____. The Hindu Temple. Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi. 1979, reprint.

Mitchell, George. The Hindu Temple.

Rowland, Benjamin. The Art and Architecture in India and Ceylon. Penguin. 1967.

Smith, Vincent. History of fine Art in India and Ceylon 2nd ed. D.B. Taraporevala Sons and Co., Bombay. 1969.

Zimmer, Heinrich. The Art of Indian Asia. Princeton. 1955.

Course Requirements

- Critical Note 10%
- Two Quizzes 10% each 20%
- Short note on Lannoy 20%

- Final short paper 20%
- Class Participation
- Final Exam 30%

Critical Note - 10% of final mark, due in early October.

I will provide some study questions on your assigned readings (from Hindu Myths) You are then to write a critical note (i.e., a short comment) responding to one of the questions. The critical note will be due at the beginning of October. It should be about three typewritten pages in length.

Quizzes - 10% each, one scheduled In October, one in November.

You will be required to identify material from slides during the in-class quizzes. All of the slides to be used for the quizzes will be made available for review in the reserve room of the library.

Short note on Lannoy - 20% of final mark, due in late October.

You will be given a short assignment on Lannoy's work. As in the case of the earlier critical note, you will be given guidance as to the approach of the assignment. This assignment should be about four to five pages long.

Short paper or project - 20% of final mark, due end of November.

This assignment will be based in part on reading from the anthology and on library/field research. I will provide a list of suggested topics later in the term. I also encourage you to come up with your own topic ideas, and I will be available for consultation during office hours if you want to discuss your ideas with me. The paper or project should be five to six pages long. Please note that the research paper or project must be a serious piece of work, It must be carefully documented and include a bibliography. If you intend to do field work, your methodology should be carefully thought-through. If you need help, please come and see me. Also, remember that plagiarism is a serious offense that can result in expulsion from the university.

Final exam - worth 30% of the final mark, to be scheduled during examination period.

Your final exam will be a formal exam scheduled during examination period. It is worth 35% of your final mark. Textbooks and notes will not be permitted in the examination room. The final exam will be based on material discussed in class. Lectures, slides, films, guest speakers, class discussions, assigned readings, etc. are all fair game for the final examination.

Class participation

More than anything else, this course is an exploration of Indian expression. You, as students, participate in that exploration through reading, listening to lectures, and contributing to the discussions the material generates. Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it.

Tentative Course Synopsis

Week I Introduction

Week II Sacred Stories and Religious Instruction

- Reflections on oral tradition and Indic views of language

- Stories from the puranas
- Hindu deities
- Didactic purposes, entertainment value

Weeks III-V Personalities of Hindu Deities

- Visnu, 10 avataras
- Krsna, child and lover
- Siva, Myth and symbol
- The great lover and the great yogin
- The Goddess, The great warrior
- Images of the feminine

Weeks VI-VII Temple as Centre

- Theory of temple
- Types of temples - folk to grand, regional styles
- Buddhist and Jain shrines
- State temples, village temples
- Burial temples
- Erotic temple art

Week VIII-IX Temple Ritual

- Consecration
- Worship
- Pilgrimage, festivals, personal vows
- Music and dance

Week X-XI. Other Rituals

- Women's rituals
- Personal celebrations
- Theory of ritual

Week XII. State Performance

- State ritual
- Cinema

Topics and Readings

1. Sept. 11 Introduction

Readings: Begin Hindu Myths and Speaking Tree.

2. Sept. 18 Sacred Stories and Religious Instruction

Readings: Hindu Myths: Introduction, pp. 11-25; chapt. 7, pp. 270-300; Speaking Tree: pp. xiv-30, 343-72.

3. Sept. 25 Visnu

Readings: Hindu Myths: chapt. 5, pp. 175-230; Speaking Tree: pp. 271-342; Article 1 in anthology, McKim Marriott, "The Feast of Love."

4. **Oct. 2** Siva

Readings: Hindu Myths: chapt. 4, pp. 116-74; Speaking Tree: pp. 83-189.

5. Thanksgiving

6. **Oct. 16** The Goddess RE246

Readings: Hindu Myths: chapt. 6, pp. 238-69; Speaking Tree: same as week 3.

7. **Oct. 23** Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu Temple Styles

Readings: Speaking Tree: pp. 57-68, 215-31; Article 2 in anthology, Roy Craven, "The Shunga dynasty and the Andra period"; Article 3 in anthology, George Mitchell, "Temple Styles."

8. **Oct. 30** Theory of temple

Readings: cont. from week 6; Article 4 in anthology, George Mitchell, "The Temple as a Link between the Gods and Man"; Article 5 in anthology, Vidya Dehejia, "Patron, Artist and Temple"; Article 6 in anthology, R. Nagaswamy, "Innovative Emperor and his Personal Chapel."

9. **Nov. 6** Temple Ritual

Readings: Article 7 in anthology, C. Fuller, "Worship"; Article 8 in anthology, C. Fuller, "Minaksi, Sundaresvara and their Temple in Madurai."

10. **Nov. 13** Pilgrimage and Vows

Readings: Article 9 in anthology, M Jha, "The Origin, Type, Spread and Nature of Hindu Pilgrimage"; Article 10 in anthology, "Murugan."

11. **Nov. 20** Personal rites, Women's rites


Readings: Article 11 in anthology, L. Babb, "Days and Weeks" and "Months and Years."

12. **Nov. 27** Death rituals

Readings: Article 12 in anthology, S. Blackburn, "Death and Deification: Folk Cults in Hinduism"; Article 13 in anthology, J. Parry, "Sacrificial death and the necrophagous ascetic."

13. **Dec. 4** State Ritual

Readings: Article 14 in anthology, N. Cutler, "The Fish-Eyed Goddess Meets the Movie Star."

Select a location 

http://www.wlu.ca/~wwwaar/syllabi/ritual_arts_asian_religions-koppedprayer.html

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