

Around A Religious Text: The *Bhagavadgītā*

ASIAN 1111

Fall 2020

Monday and Wednesday 3.00-4.15 pm (Fully online)

Instructor: Manasicha Akepiyapornchai

Office location and hours: TBA

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Course Description:

The *Bhagavadgītā*, a part of the great Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata*, is one of the most influential texts in the global context. This course explores the *Bhagavadgītā* in different aspects to answer the question of how powerful a religious text can be. We will discuss how translations, commentaries, biographies, and scholarly sources shape the *Bhagavadgītā* and contribute to its popularity in the premodern and contemporary histories. The readings include some excerpts of English translations of the *Bhagavadgītā*, spiritual writings, and studies on its importance to the fields of theology, psychoanalysis, and social culture inside and outside of South Asia. The readings will provide students with models of a variety of writing: literary reviews, reading responses, summaries, creative or personal pieces, and critical and scholarly essays.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, you will be able to develop and demonstrate the following skills:

- Discuss religious or religious related issues constructively and sensitively
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of others' ideas and writing
- Ask important questions related to religions and/or the field of religious studies
- Construct a strong and complex argument
- Use the primary and secondary sources effectively to support your argument
- Compose coherent and persuasive essays

Class Schedule: (subject to change)

Week 1: Introduction

September 2 (W)

In-class reading: Wendy Doniger, *Bhagavadgītā* (Encyclopædia Britannica)

The President and Fellows of Harvard College, *A Guide to Writing in Religious Studies*

First assignment draft

Week 2: The *Bhagavadgītā* Translated

September 7 (M)

Gavin Flood and Charles Martin, "The Bhagavad Gītā" (Introduction and chapter 1-9)

First assignment due in class and Second assignment draft

September 9 (W)

Gavin Flood and Charles Martin, "The Bhagavad Gītā" (Chapter 10-18)

Second assignment draft

Week 3: Interpretations and Commentaries on the *Bhagavadgītā*

September 14 (M)

Jonathan Edelmann, “Introducing the *Bhagavadgītā* as Theological Source Text”
Gavin Flood and Charles Martin, “Contexts”
September 16 (W)
Gavin Flood and Charles Martin, “Contexts”
Second assignment due in class and Third assignment draft

Week 4: Various Aspects of the *Bhagavadgītā*

September 21 (M)
Gavin Flood and Charles Martin, “Criticism”
September 23 (W)
Gavin Flood and Charles Martin, “Criticism”
Third assignment preparatory writing

Week 5: The *Bhagavadgītā* in the Modern Society

September 28 (M)
Jimmy Klausen, “Economies of Violence”
September 30 (W)
J. E. Llewellyn, “The Modern *Bhagavad Gītā*”
Third assignment due in class

Week 6: The *Bhagavadgītā* as an Indian Text

October 5 (M)
Michael Allen, “Knowledge and Devotion in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*”
October 7 (W)
Niranjan Saha, “Vedāntic Commentaries on the *Bhagavadgītā* as a Component of Three Canonical Texts”
Fourth assignment draft

Week 7: The *Bhagavadgītā* and Philosophy

October 12 (M)
Christopher Framarin, “The Desire You Are Required to Get Rid Of”
Sandeep Sreekumar, “An Analysis of Consequentialism and Deontology”
October 14 (W) – NO CLASS
Fourth assignment preparatory writing

Week 8: Personal Engagement with the *Bhagavadgītā*

October 19 (M)
Mahatma Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi* (Excerpts)
October 21 (W)
Mahatma Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi* (Excerpts)
Fourth assignment due in class

Week 9: Reflection on the *Bhagavadgītā*

October 26 (M)
Francis Clooney, *Learning Interreligiously* (Excerpts)

October 28 (W)

James Fitzgerald, *The Mahābhārata: The Epic of the Greater Good*
Fifth assignment draft

Week 10: The *Bhagavadgītā* as a Scripture

November 2 (M)

J.A.B. Van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā* (Excerpts)

November 4 (W)

J.A.B. Van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā* (Excerpts)
Fifth assignment draft

Week 11: Translation and Indian Religious Texts

November 9 (M)

J.A.B. Van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata* (Text and Translation)

November 11 (W)

J.A.B. Van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata* (Text and Translation)
Fifth assignment proposal due

Week 12: Into the Greater World

November 16 (M)

Richard Davis, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography* (Excerpts)

John Nemece, “Translation and the Study of Indian Religions”

November 18 (W) SEMI-FINAL

Fifth assignment preparatory writing

Week 13: Reviewing

November 23 (M) SEMI-FINAL

November 25 (W) NO CLASS - Thanksgiving Break

Week 14: “Why Study Religions?”

November 30 (M)

The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion, “Why Study Religions?”

Jeremy Hanes, “New Books in South Asian Religions”

Philipp Reisner, “New Books in Religion and Literature”

December 2 (W)

Lawrence McCrea, “In the World of Men and beyond It”

Anne Monius’ review of Freda Matchett’s *Lord of Avatāra?*

Fifth assignment workshop

Week 15: Reflection

December 7 (M) Reflection on readings

December 9 (W) Fifth assignment revision and reflection

Week 16: Conclusion

December 14 (M) Reflection on assignments

December 16 (W) Fifth assignment due in class

Course Requirements:

Attendance

You are required to attend and participate fully in all class and discussions. Punctuality is expected. More than three lates count as one absence. More than three absences will affect your grade. You are also requested to meet with me online outside of class time twice during the semester to discuss your goals and assignments.

Discussion

You are expected to have done the assigned readings before the class session in which they are due. You will be selected to facilitate the discussion by giving a short 5-minute presentation at the beginning of the class. The presentation consists of either discussion questions, oral responses, or short summaries of the readings assigned for that particular day. If you are not presenting on that day, you must be prepared to discuss the readings constructively. You might be responsible for 2-3 discussion facilitations depending on the number of the students in class. Active class discussion and participation can help raise lower grades on written assignments.

Writing Assignments

1. Personal response on your background or impression on the *Bhagavadgītā* (2 pages)
2. Summary or analysis of the content of the *Bhagavadgītā* (3-4 pages)
3. Review or reading response on the contexts or criticism of the *Bhagavadgītā* (4-5 pages)
4. Literary review or an annotated bibliography (5 pages)
5. Final research paper on the reception of the *Bhagavadgītā* or the importance of the *Bhagavadgītā* in India or the global context (10-12 pages)

Submission Guide:

You must submit all the assignments on time (**by 3.00 pm**). See the class schedule for the due dates. Proofread and spellcheck before submitting. Submit your assignment as a Word document by **email**. You may be asked to submit your final paper to **Turnitin**.

Formatting and Style Guide:

Your name and date should be at the top. A title should be included for every assignment if possible. Essays and papers should be double-spaced. The font should be in Times New Roman, 12-point. You must provide references for quotations and/or citations used in your assignment. Chicago style of citation system is preferred.

(Chicago Manual of Style: <https://www.library.cornell.edu/research/citation>)

Grading:

Class participation	15%
Discussion leading	10%
First assignment	5%
Second assignment	10%
Third assignment	15%
Fourth assignment	20%
Fifth assignment	25%

Academic Integrity and Inclusivity Statement:

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work. Violations will earn penalties. I respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to racial or ethnic discrimination, sexual harassment, providing assistance to handicapped, visually and/or hearing-impaired students, the observation of religious holidays, and plagiarism. All students are advised to familiarize themselves with the respective regulations. Finally, course readings and discussions may touch on sensitive religious related topics. We will treat all of these topics with some academic distance but respect for classmates who may feel comfortable is also necessary. Students are always encouraged to bring up any questions or concerns to my attention.