

Religions of India (Rel 213)

Skidmore College - Spring 2008

TTh 12:40-2 – Ladd 206

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Office Hours T,Th 11:15-12:15 & by appt.

This course is a thematic and historical introduction to the major religions of South Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, and Islam. In addition to providing an introduction to the development and interaction of these religions, we will pay particular attention this semester to 'popular religion' (i.e., the religious life of regular people, as opposed to monks or other specialists), the nature of divine beings and religious virtuosos, and the goals of human life.

What This Course is Not (or, the Warning Label)

Religious Studies courses in secular colleges and universities are not about 'how to be a good Buddhist' (or Hindu, Muslim, etc.) or about 'why Buddhism (or Hinduism, Islam, etc.) is wrong.' Evidence and arguments must follow the same rules and rest on the same criteria as other academic enquiries, rather than relying on personal faith commitments or worldviews. Thus, I expect you to consider the materials we cover this semester not in terms of whether (for example) the Bhagavad-gita is right or wrong, true or false, but rather in terms of the influences upon it (does it reject earlier views or expand upon them?), what religious and social situation it reflects, and the impact it likely had, not simply in the religious sphere, but also the social, political, and historical ones. While you are welcome to find personal inspiration in these materials, or think about how the practices and beliefs of Indic religions differ from or confirm your own personal spiritual views, these are not appropriate topics for class discussion.

It is the assumption of this course and the university as a whole that people will behave in a responsible and ethical manner. This includes behaving respectfully towards others - classmates, instructors, the authors we read, and the people whose religious beliefs we are studying. Discussion and writing should be characterized by honesty, enthusiasm, critical thought, and respect for the lifestyles, worldviews, and beliefs of others. 'Critical thought' does not mean being nasty to or about other people, but evaluating their ideas and practices -- in terms of their religious/social/political/historical contexts -- intelligently and with a spirit of collegiality and good will.



Required Reading:

1. Carter, John and Mahinda Palihawadana, trans. *The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha*. Oxford World's Classics, 2000.
2. Eck, Diana. *Darshan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. 3rd edition. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998.
3. Elias, James, trans. *Death Before Dying: Sufi Poetry of Sultan Bahu*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
4. Hopkins, Steven P., trans. *An Ornament for Jewels: Love Poems for the Lord of Gods*. OUP, 2007.
5. Miller, Barbara Stoller, trans. *The Bhagavad-Gita*. Random House, 1986.
6. Mittal, Sushil and Gene Thursby. *Religions of South Asia*. Taylor and Francis, 2006.
7. Narayan, R. K., *Gods, Demons and Others*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
8. Williams, Paul. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
9. Materials on e-reserve via WebCT.

Recommended (available via abe.com, amazon.com, etc.)

Ludden, David. *India and South Asia: A Short History*. Oneworld.

Methods of Evaluation

1. **Reflection Papers (6 papers, 600 words each, 30%)**: Six papers, each of which is at least 600 words long (2-3 pages), are due over the course of the semester. At least 3 papers must be submitted prior to the midterm. Unless you have my explicit permission to do otherwise, papers must answer one of the discussion questions provided on the syllabus, and should do so with reference to the assigned reading(s). Papers are due via email by the start of class the day the reading is assigned. Further guidelines will be distributed in class.
2. **Midterm and final exam (40% total)**. Both will be take-home essay exams; the final exam is cumulative. Exams are due via email in Microsoft Word format; if you forget to attach your document or submit it in a format that cannot be read in Word, it will count as late. Helpful hint: if you can answer the weekly discussion questions you should get an A+ on the exams.

No extensions will be granted. If your computer gets stolen, your grandmother dies, or you get mono, you have my sympathy – but out of fairness to your classmates, if these events make you to miss the deadline, then your exam will drop a third of a letter grade per day (24 hours).
3. **Group Presentation (10%)**. In lieu of a research paper, you will have an opportunity to make a group presentation to the class. Presentations should be no more than 20 minutes and will be given during the last month of classes. Further guidelines will be distributed in class.
4. **Attendance and Participation (10%)**. Students are expected to attend class daily save for legitimate, documented excuses (serious illness or death in the immediate family). Frequent tardiness / leaving early will also impact the attendance grade. The scale for participation is as

follows: 5 = frequently contributed to discussion (spoke several times during class, every week); 4 = contributed regularly (spoke almost every week); 3 = contributed occasionally (spoke >50% of classes); 2 = rarely contributed (spoke <50% of classes); 1 = never spoke, slept in class or was obviously inattentive or disruptive. These grades will be adjusted upwards or downwards if the quality of your contributions are well above or below average.

If you are shy, you can send me an e-mail with thoughts, questions, or comments or come see me during office hours. If you miss more than 3 classes you will automatically fail the course.

- 5. Quizzes (10%).** A few short quizzes, to check to see if you've memorized certain places, names, dates, and vocabulary words.

Statement on Plagiarism

Please be sure to familiarize yourself with Skidmore's policies concerning plagiarism, which I strictly enforce. Many students are insufficiently informed about what precisely constitutes plagiarism; before writing your paper, be sure that you review the "Skidmore Guide to Writing"

This class abides by Skidmore College's Academic Integrity policy. Cheating, plagiarism, and other types of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and can result in penalties ranging from a zero on the assignment to expulsion from the University.

Special Needs: Students with special needs (physical challenges, learning disabilities, etc.) are welcome in this class. Please notify the College's ADA coordinator and your instructor in advance if you will need accommodations and/or auxiliary aids.

Note: It is the assumption of this course and the college as a whole that people will behave in a responsible and ethical manner. This includes behaving respectfully towards others - classmates, instructors, the authors we read, and the people whose religious beliefs we are studying. Discussion and writing should be characterized by honesty, enthusiasm, critical thought, and respect for the lifestyles, worldviews, and beliefs of others. Note that 'critical thought' does not mean being nasty to or about other people, but evaluating their ideas and practices intelligently and with a spirit of collegiality and good will.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

RSA = *Religions of South Asia*

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) can be found online in the “Readings” section of WebCT.

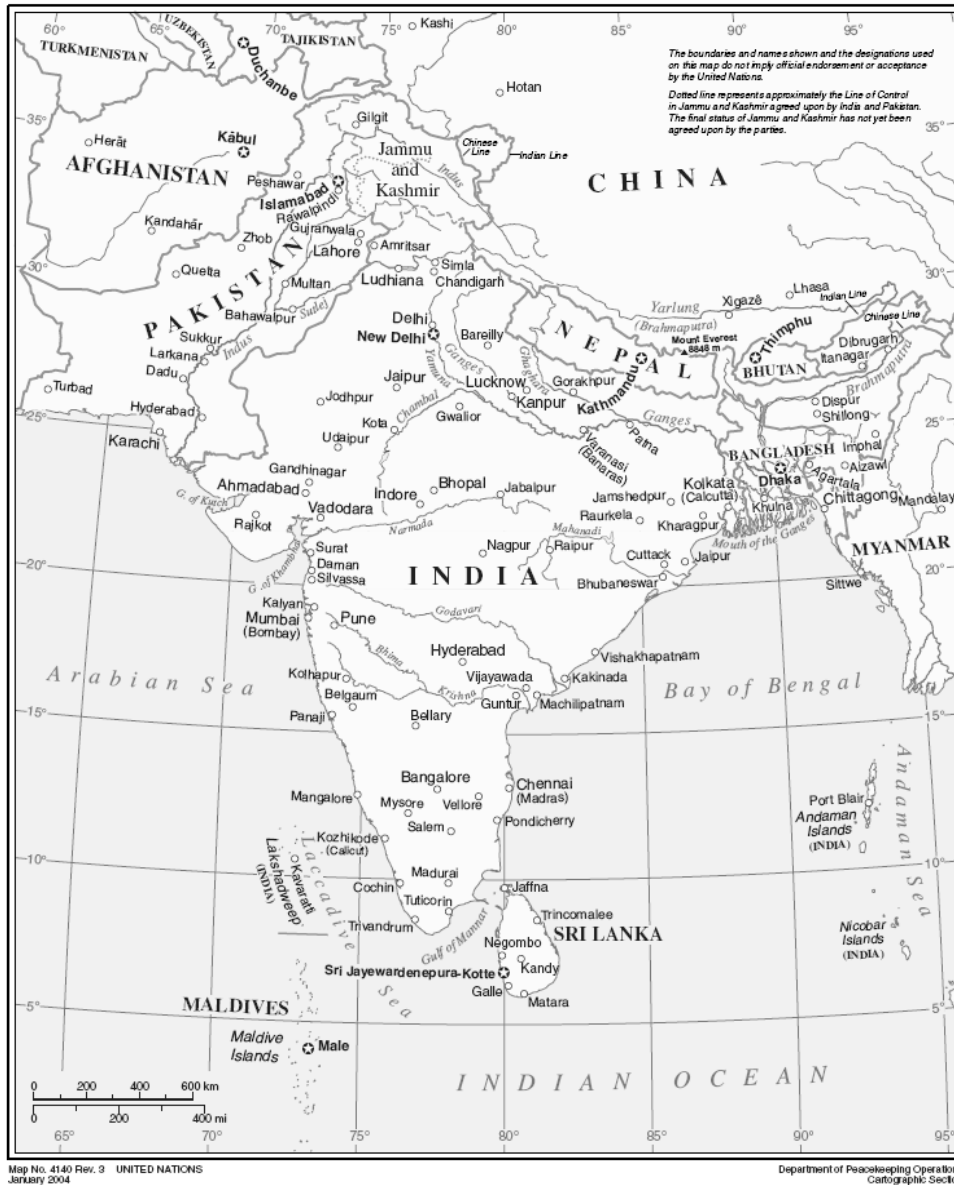
Generic Discussion Question

In addition to any other questions specifically asked for each week, be able to discuss the following: What were the views of the authors of the texts from this period about (1) the goal(s) of human life; (2) the method(s) for attaining those goals; (3) the nature of divine beings and their relationship to #2; and (4) who can (most easily) attain those goals?

Week 1. Introductions & Overview of Early India	
In class this week: introductions; powerpoint lecture on Indus Valley Civilization, watch excerpts from <i>Altar of Fire</i> ; powerpoint lecture on Vedic & Upanisadic religion	
1/22 T	No assigned reading.
1/24 R	Vedas through Upanishads: RSA pp. 1-26 (to bottom of page), 36-43; *O’Flaherty, <i>Rig Veda</i>
Week 2. Overview of Early India (cont): the Rise of the Heterodox Movements	
In class: powerpoint lecture introducing Buddhism & Jainism; discuss readings starting with these questions: Think about the figure of Mahavira and the Buddha and their role in the development of their traditions: To what extent was their origin and spread the result of the individual charisma and spiritual insights of the two and to what extent was it the result of changes in society, politics, or the economy? (Another way of asking this question: would Buddhism have come into existence if the Buddha never lived? If the social, political, and/or economic circumstances were different?) Consider the place of brahmins, kshatriyas, laypeople, monks and nuns: which group(s) were the most important for early Buddhism and Jainism, and why? Finally, what values are central for Buddhists and Jains, and how does this compare/contrast with Vedic values?	
1/29 T	Jainism: RSA, 87-101; *Granoff, <i>Forest of Thieves</i>
1/31 R	Buddhism: RSA, 103-27; Map Quiz
3. In Depth Look at The Buddha & Early Buddhism	
Same questions as last week.	
2/5 T	Williams, <i>Buddhist Thought</i> , Ch. 1, 41-61
2/7 R	<i>Dhammapada</i> , ODD numbered verses only (rec: even verses)
3. In Depth Look at The Buddha & Early Buddhism (cont)	
Same questions as last week.	
2/12 T	Williams, <i>Buddhist Thought</i> , 62-95
2/14 R	*Conze, <i>Buddhist Scriptures</i>
Week 5. Mahayana & Vajrayana Buddhism	
What is Williams’ argument about the reasons for the rise of Mahayana Buddhism? Of Vajrayana? What arguments does he reject? Consider the place of brahmins, kshatriyas, laypeople, monks and nuns: which group(s) were the most important for Mahayana Buddhism, and why? For Vajrayana? Looking back over the Buddhism readings, identify the central values for the Theravada and the Mahayana, and compare and contrast those values with those of the Vedic period.	
2/19 T	Williams 96-111, 131-91
2/21 R	Williams 192-202 (stop before very last paragraph on page), 217-44; Quiz on Weeks 1-5
Week 6. Judaism & Christianity in India	
Are the religious lives of Indian Jews and Christians closer to their Hindu neighbors, or to their co-religionists outside of India?	

2/26 T	Judaism: RSA 169ff; *Kashrut article
2/28 R	Christianity: RSA 185ff; *Waghorne
Week 7. Zoroastrianism & Sikhism (Discussion Questions TBA)	
3/4 T	Zoroastrianism: RSA 151-66; *Boyce
3/6 R	Sikhism: RSA 131-48; *Nanak, *Kabir
3/7 Fri	Take-home midterm due via email @ 5 pm.
SPRING BREAK.	
Week 8. Sectarian Hinduism: an Overview.	
It has been argued that the Bhagavad-gita was composed as the Hindu response to Buddhism. Identify three points where the ideas of the Bhagavad-gita are similar to Buddhist ones, and three that are different. What were the views of the Gita's author about (1) the goal(s) of human life; (2) the method(s) for attaining those goals; (3) the nature of divine beings and their relationship to #2; and (4) who can (most easily) attain those goals?	
3/18 T	RSA pp. 27-36, 44-65 (in the section on the 6 philosophical schools, go ahead and skip the paragraphs on Nyaya, Vaisesika, and Mimamsa); *Radhakrishnan
3/20 R	Miller, trans., <i>Bhagavad-gita</i> , selections TBA
Week 9. Sectarian Hinduism In-Depth: Who's Who in the Hindu Pantheon	
What are the "personalities" of each of the major deities? What stereotypes are displayed in the stories (about men and women, priests and kings and ascetics)? How do these compare and contrast with figures in the Jataka stories? Is there such a thing as a virtuous demon?	
3/25 T	Narayan, <i>Gods, Demons</i>
3/27 R	*Fuller, <i>Camphor Flame</i> excerpt
Week 10. Sectarian Hinduism In-Depth: Rituals and Practices	
When did image worship become part of Hinduism, and what are its basic elements? What changes, if any, were there in the priest-layperson relationship as a result? As you read Eck, note the various ways in which Hindus have understood the relationship between images, deity, and the act of worship, and in particular the extent to which deities and image worship help fulfill human goals.	
4/1 T	RSA, 66-80; Eck, <i>Darsan</i> , Ch. 1
4/3 R	Eck, <i>Darsan</i> , Ch. 2-3 and afterword
Week 11. Hindu Devotionalism (discussion questions TBA)	
4/8 T	Hopkins, <i>Ornament</i>
4/10 R	Hopkins, <i>Ornament</i> (cont)
Week 12. Overview of Islam	
Are the religious lives of Indian Muslims closer to their Hindu neighbors, or to their co-religionists outside of India?	
4/15	RSA 201-45; Hinduism Quiz
4/17	*Pinault, <i>The Shi'ites</i> , excerpt.
Week 13. Islam In-Depth: Pilgrimage & Worship in South Asian Islam	
How does Islamic pilgrimage compare and contrast with the Hindu pilgrimages described by Eck? Does your answer change if you are talking about Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca or to a Sufi lodge?	
4/22	*Donnan, "Symbol and Status"; *Wolfe
4/24	*Werbner (WARNING: This is a challenging reading; give yourself extra time to figure out what her argument is. And why does she talk about the Hajj?)
Week 14. Islam In-Depth: Sufism	
What aspects of God's "personality" and Islamic practice did Sultan Bahu emphasize? How do these compare and contrast with the poetry of Nanak and Kabir? Of Vedantadeshika? With the practices of non-Sufi Islam?	

SOUTH ASIA



<http://www.un.org/Depts/C/artographic/map/profile/seasia.pdf>

Be able to locate the following on a blank map:

Countries in South Asia:

Afghanistan	India
Pakistan	Nepal
Bhutan	Sri Lanka
Bangladesh	Tibet*

Capitals & Important Cities:

New Delhi	Amritsar
Kabul	Varanasi
Islamabad	Calcutta
Dhaka	Mumbai
Lhasa	Chennai

Rivers, Seas, and Oceans:

Indus River
Ganges River
Arabian Sea
Bay of Bengal
Indian Ocean

*Tibet is to the north of Bhutan and Nepal; it isn't shown because it has been invaded & occupied by China. Lhasa was its capital.