



The City, the River, the Sacred

RELG 350: *Living Religious Traditions in India*

Course Description

This course aims to expose students to the religious diversity of India and thus enhance their understanding of the diverse and composite character of Indian culture and its people.

The course focuses on the study of the history, texts, beliefs, and practices pertaining to the main religious traditions of India (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, and Sikhism), while also exploring the socio-political implication of religious beliefs and customs. In the context and backdrop of religion, students will also examine encounters between tradition and modernity.

The course gives students the opportunity to develop an academic understanding of the festivals, rituals and artistic presentations that may be observed during the semester in Varanasi.

Learning Objectives

The purpose of this course is to develop an awareness of the manifold factors contributing to contemporary religious life in India. Students will be expected to

1. Gain a sense of the basic diversity of religious customs in India
2. Be able to distinguish between textual prescriptions and actual practice
3. Understand the dynamism which gives tenacity to religions against the shocks of time.
4. Learn to conduct interviews with local citizens during the course field visits and compare their results with textual sources into class discussions.
5. Articulate evidence supported opinions into class discussions and debates.

Course Schedule

Session 01/02-29 Religious Landscape of India

Course overview and Introduction to Indian Religions from a historical and socio-cultural perspective.

Readings:

Madan T.N. (2005). Religions in India: Plurality and Pluralism, in Malik Jamal, Reifeld Helmut ed. *Religious Pluralism in South Asia and Europe*, New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press. (pp. 42-76).

Session 03-29 Plant and Tree worship

Introduction to nature worship in India. Tree worship: Yakshas and tree worship; the idea of wish-fulfilling tree; sacred plants in Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina tradition; selected tree worship practices in present day India.

Readings:

Gupta, Shakti. (2001). *Plant, Myths and Traditions in India*. New Delhi, India: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. (pp. 3-15, 44- 51, 66-72).

Assignments:

Writing Assignment 1 – 3/4 page (750-1000 words) reflection paper based on the observation and comment of the morning rituals on the ghats along Gange river. Due on class 7.

Session 04-29 Sacred water and river worship

Symbolism of water (river as liquid shakti). Ganga Mata (Mother Ganges) and the other sacred rivers of India. River worship and bathing ritual in present day practice.

Readings:

Eck, Diana. (1984). “Ganga: The Goddess in Hindu Sacred Geography”. in Hawley Stratton, John and Wulff, Donna Marie. *The Divine Consort. Radha and the Goddesses of India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. (pp. 166-183).

Session 05-29 Worship of celestial bodies

The nine planets and their mythology. Worship of Sun nowadays: the festival of Dala Chhat and Lolarka chat. Introduction to “Jyotish”, the traditional Hindu system of astronomy and astrology.

Readings:

Gupta, M.D., Gupta, Prashant. *The Sun-God/Lord Moon/ Lord Mars/ Lord Mercury/ Lord Jupiter/ Lord Venus/ Lord Saturn/ Rahu and Ketu*, New Delhi: Dreamland Publications, selected pages.

Session 06-29 Jainism

Transformation from a path of renouncers to a religion including both ascetic and lay communities. Debate about the meaning of God and divinity; worship, rituals, festivals, fasts and pilgrimage.

Readings:

Dundas, Paul. (1992). *The Jains*. London, UK: Routledge. (pp. 10-15; 36-39: 135-138: 146-149). Cort, E. John. (1998). “Jain Questions and Answers: Who is God and How is He Worshipped?”. in Lopez Donald S. (ed.). *Religions of India in Practice*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. (pp. 598-608). Granoff, Phyllis. (1998). “Jain Stories

Inspiring Renunciation”, in Lopez Donald S. ed. *Religions of India in Practice*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. (pp. 412-417).

Session 07-29 Visit to Jain sacred places in Varanasi

What means to be a Jain today.

Readings:

Dundas, Paul. (1992). *The Jains*. London, UK: Routledge. (pp. 171-194).

Assignments:

- Writing Assignment 1 due.
 - Students are expected to prepare questions for the interview with a Buddhist monk after reading the text assigned for sessions 8-9.
 - Written paper mentioning title, topic and objective (i.e. the question that the research seeks to answer) of final research papers. Due on class 13.
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Session 08/09-29 Field visit to Sarnath (interview with Buddhist monk)

Readings:

Harvey Peter. (2005). *An Introduction to Buddhism. Teachings, History and Practices*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India. (pp.121-128, 170-176, 179-180, 190-202, 207, 217-218, 220-221, 224-227, 231-233; 236, 238-239, 244-246.).

Session 10-29 Neo-Buddhism

Reading:

Fuchs Martin. 2004. “Ambedkar’s Buddhism” in Madan T.N. (ed.). *India’s Religions*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 307-326.

Session 11-29 Shiva and his worship –Linga

The linga form of Shiva and his worship. The festivals and pilgrimage sites associated with Shiva.

Readings:

Eck, Diana L. (1993). *Banaras City of Light*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. (pp. 94-112).

Session 12-29 Visit to Shiva temple

Session 13-29 Shiva and his worship - Bhairava

Bhairava: terrible manifestation of Shiva and protector of Varanasi. The Aghora panth.

Readings:

Visuvalingam Elizabeth-Charlier. 1993. "Bhairava: Kotwala of Varanasi", Singh. P.B. Rana (ed.), *Banaras (Varanasi): Cosmic Order, Sacred City, Hindu Traditions*, Varanasi: Tara Book Agency. (pp. 163-177).

Assignments:

- Statement of title, topic and objective of final research papers due. Term paper due on class 29 at time of class presentation.
- Writing Assignment 2 – 5 page paper (1250 words) comparing worship, fasting and pilgrimage practices in Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism. Due on class 19.

Session 14-29 The Great Goddess – Devi

The concept of Shakti and Shakti pithas. *Devi* and the most important goddesses of Hindu pantheon. The most important Shakta festival in India: Festival of Navaratri-Durga puja.

Readings:

Coburn, Thomas B. (1984). Consort of None, Sakti of All: The Vision of the Devi-Mahatmya. In Hawley John Stratton and Wulff Donna Marie (ed.). *The Divine Consort. Radha and The Goddesses of India*. New Delhi, India: Motilala Banarsidas. (pp. 153--165).

Session 15-29 Visit to Goddess temple

Session 16-29 The worship of Goddess Kali

The goddess Kali and Shri Ramakrishna.

Readings:

McDermott, Rachel.(1998). 'Bengali Songs to Kali'. in Lopez Donald S. (ed.). *Religions of India in Practice*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. (pp. 55-76).

Session 17-29 Rama and The Ramayana

The story of Rama: Valmiki's Ramayana and Tulsidas' Ramacharitmanas. The different meanings attached to the figure of Rama.

Readings:

Ramanujan. A.K.. (1991). Three Hundred Ramyanas: Five Examples and Three thoughts on Translation. In Richman, Paula. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. (pp. 22-49).

Session 18-29 Hanuman

Visit to Sankat Mochan Hanuman temple.

Assignments:

- Writing Assignment 2 due.
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Session 19-29 Krishna

The many aspects of Krishna's revelation: the Divine Child , the Amorous Cowherd, the Lord of the Universe (Jagannath).

Readings:

Doniger O'Flaherty, Wendy. (2004). *Hindu Myths*. London: Penguin Books. (pp. 204-231).

McKim, Marriot. (1966). The Feast of Love. In Singer Milton (ed.). *Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes*. Honolulu, USA: East-West Center Press. (pp. 200-212)

Session 20-29 Visit to Gopala temple

Session 21/22-29 Muslim India and Indian Muslims

Introduction to the fundamentals of Islam. Peculiarities of Indian Islam. Significance of main festivals and practices of Muslims in India.

Readings:

Clothey, Fred W. (2008). *Religion in India. A Historical Introduction*., New York-London: Routledge. (pp. 122-135); Esposito, John L. (1998). *Islam: The Straight Path*. New York: Oxford University Press. (pp. 88-114)

Session 23-29 Visit to Mosque

Session 24-29 Sufism

Islamic mysticism: the emergence of Sufism. The cult of Sufi saints and *dargahs* in India.

Readings:

Pinto, Desiderio. (2004). "Muslim Spiritual Masters". in Madan T. N. (ed.). *India's Religions. Perspective from Sociology and History*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 185-195.

Session 25-29 Visit to Dargah

Session 26-29 Sikhism

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Readings:

Clothey, Fred W. (2008). *Religion in India. A Historical Introduction*., New York-London: Routledge. (pp. 155-159): Cole, Owen W. and Sambhi, Singh Piara.(1978) *The Sikhs. Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. London, UK: Routledge. (pp.122-135, 168-179)

Session 27-29 Sikh identity nowadays

Interview with Gurudwara Manager

Session 28-29 Presentation

Session 29-29 Presentation

Evaluation

Attendance & Class Participation	15%
Homework Assignment 1	15%
Homework Assignment 2	20%
Term Paper	40%
Presentation (based on the final assignment)	10%

Assessment Criteria

Class Participation

Students will be assigned by turns to summarize the argument of the assigned reading (What is the main point of the text? What are the sources and the kinds of evidence the author uses to demonstrate the validity of the argument? The most surprising things they found in the reading?). Students are also encouraged to prepare questions to facilitate group discussion.

Homework Assignment 1

Students will write a 3-4 page (750-1000 words) reflection paper based on the observation and comment of the morning rituals on the ghats along Gange river. Students will be assessed on their ability of analyzing their observations and articulate evidence supported explanations for the prevalence of Nature Worship even in today's Hindu world.

The use of additional bibliographical resources, besides class readings, will impact positively paper grade. In case the observations will not be possible due to weather or floods, this assignment will be substituted by a response paper to a question on Nature Worship in India given by the teacher.

Homework Assignment 2

Students will write a 5 page paper (1250 words) comparing the practices of two Indian religious traditions among Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism. Students are requested to focus only on one specific aspect like image worship, the concepts of fast or pilgrimage. Students will be assessed on their ability of expressing evidence supported opinions about the subject of their choice. Students are expected to use at least 3 bibliographic resources other than class readings. Personal observation or interviews may also be used as resources for this paper.

Term Paper and Presentation

In the term paper, students will choose a class-related topic of their own interest which needs to be approved by the course professor and write a 6 page (1500 word) survey. The paper will contain an overview of the topic area, a summary of the key trends and insights, along with the appropriate references. Arguments should be supported by at least five outside sources, in addition to the course materials provided.

Students are expected to submit within class 13 a written paper mentioning title, topic and objective of their term papers.

Students will be assessed on their ability to formulate a clear paper objective (appropriate to be dealt with in 6 page paper), review the relevant literature in the field, engage in independent research in addressing the topic, justify the research methods used for the study, present and analyze their findings.

Grading

Alliance programs utilize the follow standard grading policy well accepted by most US institutions.

Excellent	A	93-100%	Good	B+	87-89%	Acceptable	C+	77-79%
	A-	90-92%		B	83-86%		C	73-76%
				B-	80-82%		C-	70-72%
						Unsatisfactory	D+	67-69%
							D	63-66%
							D-	60-62%
						Failing	F	<60%

Course Policies

Exams and Assignments

Students are required to take all regularly scheduled exams in courses for which they are registered, and to submit all assignments on time. Any compelling academic, personal, or medical reason that might justify a rescheduled exam or assignment must be brought up to the Resident Director, not program faculty. Failure to take scheduled exams or submit the requisite assignments for a course will adversely affect your grade as per the stated grading criteria for each course.

Classroom Conduct

Student punctuality is extremely important in China and India. Please do not be late for classes or other activities, as it is considered impolite to do so. It is improper to eat in class, to engage in other activities such as texting, or to slump or nap. Students are expected to be alert and engaged as a sign of respect for their professors.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory. It is essential that the students participate fully in the coursework and all required academic activities. Authorized absences may only be approved by the Resident Director, and students are expected to make up any missed work. Unauthorized absences will adversely affect a student's grades.