

# RLST 2120: Introduction to Hinduism

**Fall 2010** TTH 1:00-2:15 (or 2:45) CC 4

**Instructor:** Dr. Lola Williamson

**Ford Fellow:** Sameer Goel (Tuesdays)

**Office:** Christian Center 10

**Office Hours:** MTWR, 2:30-3:30, or by appointment

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This class explores the Hindu tradition in all of its complexity. We'll examine how the transmission of Hindu thought and symbols occurs through scriptures, stories, rituals, pilgrimage, philosophy, film, dance, sculpture, painting, and architecture. Taking learning beyond the classroom we'll visit Hindu temples and homes, as well as enjoy Indian cuisine.



## Texts

*Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion* by Stephen Huyler

*Gitagovinda of Jayadeva: Love Song of the Dark Lord* translated by Barbara S. Miller

*The Ramayana* retold by R. K. Narayan

*Vedanta: Heart of Hinduism* by Hans Torwesten

*Bhagavad Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War* translated by Barbara S. Miller

Additional readings emailed

## Films

*Hinduism: 330 Million Gods*, from *The Long Search* series

*Puja*, Smithsonian production

*Water*, directed by Mehta Deepa

*Sita Sings the Blues*, written, directed, produced, and animated Nina Paley, 2009

*Salaam Bombay!* directed by Mira Nair, 1988 (movie and dinner night)

*Darshan: The Embrace*, documentary directed by Jan Kounan, 2005

Selections from BBC's *The Story of India*

## Attendance

You are expected to attend all classes. If you miss a class due to illness, family crisis, religious holiday, or Millsaps-sponsored travel, please inform me of the reason for your absence and provide documentation. More than two unexcused absences will affect your final grade, with two points being subtracted for each class missed after two absences. If you do need to miss more than two classes for any of the above reasons, you can avoid the grade penalty by writing a two-page essay of A or B quality on the reading material for the class missed. This should be more than a summary; it should include thoughtful analysis. The essay is due one week from the missed class. I will only accept this if you have provided documentation for all missed

classes. If you miss ten or more classes (about a third of the semester) for any reason, you should withdraw from the course to avoid receiving an F. If the absences occur after the final day to withdraw without a grade (Nov. 5), you should make arrangements for a medical withdrawal in order to avoid receiving an F.

## Grading Scale

A (94-100) A- (90-93) B+ (87-89) B (83-86) B- (80-82) C+ (77-79) C (73-76)  
C- (70-72) D+ (67-69) D (63-66) D- (60-62) F (0-59)

## Disability Accommodations

If you have any needs or require accommodations related to a disability, please contact Patrick Cooper to register for disability services. You can reach him via e-mail at [coopeap@millsaps.edu](mailto:coopeap@millsaps.edu) or by calling extension 1228. Accommodations will not be granted until a meeting with Patrick has taken place each semester and letters have been received by your instructor.

## Course Evaluation

- 10% Participation
- 30% 3 five-page papers (10% each)
- 30% 3 quizzes (10% each)
- 20% 10-page research paper (Up to ten points will be taken off the final paper if the research questions and/or preliminary prospectus and annotated bibliography are not handed in on time or are deemed unsatisfactory)
- 10% Research process presentation

Attendance at two Hindu celebrations is required. We'll visit the Hindu Temple for Navaratri and attend a puja at Sameer Goel's home. (An alternative will be provided if there is a time conflict with either of these events.) A possible ten points (5 points for each) will be deducted from the final grade for not attending.

We will also gather one evening for a film at my home and dinner at Ruchi's. This is not required, but you won't want to miss it. Dinner is on the department! The film, *Salaam Bombay*, depicts the slums of Bombay (Mumbai) similar to *Slum Dog Millionaire*, but is, in my opinion, a finer film.

## Requirement Descriptions

### Participation

Come to class prepared to discuss the material listed in the class schedule. I will often send you questions to consider by email. It will come with a "high importance" alert and the subject line will say "Hinduism." DON'T DELETE IT. Print the questions and jot down notes and ideas to bring with you to class. Even when I don't send questions, please take notes and write your reactions to the reading. To receive an A for participation, you must demonstrate through your questions, comments, and visible notes that you have thoroughly digested the reading material. By "visible notes," I mean that I see you getting out your notes at the beginning of class and

referring to them during discussion. Dramatic dialogues from the poem, *Love Song of the Dark Lord*, will also count toward your participation grade.

### **Three Essays**

These are five-page essays due at the close of each unit. The specific topic is up to you, but it should analyze some aspect of the yoga under consideration. Use standard formatting and documentation: 12-point Times New Roman, inserted page numbers, no title page, in-text citations, and a Works Cited page. No outside research is necessary.

### **Three Quizzes**

The quizzes will entail defining terms and answering short questions about the material from each unit. They are designed to take no more than forty minutes.

### **Research Paper**

I expect you to put ample time and effort into your analysis of any topic about the Hindu tradition that you want to explore. Required preliminary steps are designed to help you research and write at a sustained rate rather than waiting until the last minute. The excuse that interlibrary loan materials have not arrived in time to write an acceptable annotated bibliography will not be accepted. You must plan ahead!

**Research Questions, Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography:** Please note the due dates for these in the class schedule. As soon as your research topic is approved, order your interlibrary loan sources. They may take two weeks to arrive. In the one-page prospectus, discuss your research question and the general direction you intend to take in answering it. Your bibliography must contain a minimum of eight sources. At least one should be a primary source. For example, if you are writing about Dalits (outcastes), you should include an essay or piece of artwork that a Dalit has produced. At least one source must be a peer-reviewed journal article. In your annotation of four to five sentences, explain briefly what the source is about and how you intend to use it.

### **Research Process Presentation**

This will be on one aspect of your research paper that you think the class will find interesting. Ideally, it should be a debatable topic that will generate a lively discussion. Email the class a short excerpt (of a few pages) from your research material ahead of time. Think of your class time as “teaching time” rather than as a formal presentation. This comes before you’ve written your paper, so you don’t have to be an expert on every aspect of the topic. In fact, the discussion can be used to ignite your own thinking in order to write a better paper. You’ll speak for about five minutes and the remaining ten minutes will be used for discussion. It’s your responsibility to bring the discussion back to life if it begins to lag.

## **Class Schedule**

Note that the schedule may need to be adjusted during the course of the semester. Always bring the text we will be discussing to class.

### **Week 1**

Aug. 24      Overview of course and documentary: *Hinduism: 330 Million Gods*  
(Rakhi Day: Celebration of older brothers’ protection of younger sisters)

## **Unit One**

## **Bhakti Yoga: The Path of Devotion**

Aug. 26 *Meeting God*, foreword, preface, and chapter 1; Lecture: Toward a Definition of Hinduism

### **Week 2**

Aug. 31 *Meeting God*, chapters 2 and 3; View *Puja* (15 minute documentary)

Sept. 2 *Meeting God*, chapters 4 and 5; Lecture: Three Great Deities of Hinduism (Sri Krishna Janmashtami: Krishna's birthday)

### **Week 3**

Sept. 7 *Meeting God*, chapters 6 and 7; Lecture: Puranas (Old Stories) and Deities

Sept. 9 *Meeting God*, chapters 8 and 9; Lecture: Stages of Life and the Tradition of Renunciation

Sept. 11 (Ganesh Chaturthi: Ganesha's birthday)

### **Week 4**

Sept. 14 *Love Song of the Dark Lord*, intro, pp. 69-94; Lecture: Devotional Orders

Sept. 16 *Love Song of the Dark Lord*, 95-125; Lecture: Art of Kangra

### **Week 5**

Sept. 21 **Quiz**; Prepare dramatic readings of *Gita-Govinda: Love Song of the Dark Lord* (I will be at a conference)

Sept. 23 Dramatic readings and general fun! Costumes are a must!

**Sept. 27 Essay due by 12:00 noon on Monday, Sept. 27**

## **Unit Two**

### **Karma Yoga and Dharma: The Path of Action**

#### **Week 6**

Sept. 28 *Ramayana*, chapters 1-3; Lecture: Life Cycle Rituals

Sept. 30 *Ramayana*, chapters 4-6; Lecture: Gender Roles

#### **Week 7**

Oct. 5 *Ramayana*, chapters 7-epilogue; Lecture: *Ramayana* and Popular Culture

- Oct. 7 Readings emailed: excerpts from *Rig Veda* and *Code of Manu*;  
*Why I am Not a Hindu* by Kancha Ilaiah; Lecture: Caste, Varna, and Jati
- Oct. 8 Nava-ratri begins (nine nights of the goddess; ends with “tenth day,” or Dussehra, a celebration of Rama’s defeat of Ravana, on Oct. 17; **visit Hindu Temple; more information coming**)
- Week 8**
- Oct. 12 **Quiz**; Begin *Water*
- Oct. 14 Preliminary research for final paper; Finish *Water*
- (Oct. 15 Mid-semester grades)
- Week 9**
- Oct. 19 **No class – Fall Break**
- Oct. 21 **Turn in two research questions with paragraph on each**; Film: *Sita Sings the Blues*
- Oct. 25 Essay Due by 12:00 noon on Monday, Oct. 25**

### Unit Three

### Jñana Yoga: The Path of Knowledge

- Week 10**
- Oct.26 *Vedanta*, pp. 1-36; Upanishads and Meister Eckhart excerpts emailed (print and bring, but no need to read ahead of time);
- Oct.28 *Vedanta*, pp. 37-73; Upanishads emailed (as above, print and bring)
- (Mar. 31 Last day to withdraw with grade of W)
- Week 11**
- Nov. 2 *Vedanta*, pp. 74-97; *Bhagavad-Gita*, chapter 1, 2, 3;
- Nov. 4 *Vedanta* pp. 97-114; *Bhagavad-Gita*, chapter 4, 5, 6
- (Nov. 4 Diwali)
- Week 12**
- Nov. 9 *Vedanta*, pp. 115-150; Shankara excerpt emailed (print and bring)
- Nov. 11 *Vedanta*, pp. 151-186
- Nov. 15 **Essay due by 12:00 noon on Monday, Nov. 15**

**Week 13**

Nov. 16 Class evaluations; begin documentary: *Darshan: The Embrace*

Nov. 18 **Quiz**; finish *Darshan: The Embrace*

**Week 14**

Nov. 23 **Prospectus and annotated bibliography due.** Lecture: Hinduism in America

Nov. 25 Thanksgiving break

**Week 15**

Nov. 30 **Research process presentations**

Dec. 2 **Research process presentations**

**FINALS WEEK**

Dec. 9 **Research paper due by 4:00 p.m.**