

RELS 245 The Hindu Tradition (Fall 2020)

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Course Description

“Hinduism” refers to a vast and diverse culture of religious ideas and devotional practices, sacred stories and social norms, that have spanned the millennia in India. This course will focus on enduring themes that have shaped and reshaped tradition and that lend a sense of unity to the complex puzzle of Hinduism. The themes that we will explore pertain to philosophy (the relationship between illusion and reality, the soul and the body, the One and the Many), ritual practices (sacrificial rituals to gain worldly power vs. ascetic renunciation, pilgrimage and yoga) and social institutions and ethics (kingship and nationalism, caste, race, and gender roles, violence and tolerance). We will trace the transmission and transformation of these beliefs and values, practices and institutions, from ancient to modern India and into the United States. We will learn that Hindu culture is plural and inclusive and it has evolved to meet the needs of people in different times and in different geographic regions within India and abroad.

We will rely extensively on classical texts in the required readings, but we will also read essays that describe Hinduism as a living religion, and two books, a travelogue and a pilgrim’s story, that feature western seekers of enlightenment through sacred narratives, including the *Ramayana* epic. We will also watch documentary films that illustrate how Hindu values and customs are woven into their daily lives. You should treat these films as visual “texts” that require careful viewing and critical interpretation.

Course goals and student learning outcomes

- to challenge ethnocentric assumptions about “religion” and Hinduism as a “world religion”
- to acquire religious literacy in the key ideas and practices of Hinduism
- to develop interpretive skills by reading classic Hindu texts, place them in their social and historical contexts, and analyze their multiple religious dimensions
- to demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft an argument in defense of a thesis

This course also satisfies the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes** for the Humanities:

- 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted, and valued in various expressions of human culture; 2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

These two General Education learning outcomes will be demonstrated on the **2nd essay** due 9/24 (10%)

2 Required Texts are available from Amazon or the **Barnes & Noble CofC Bookstore** to buy or borrow:

- Jonah Blank, *Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God*. Grove Press edition 1992. ISBN: 9780802137333
- Ariel Glucklich, *Climbing Chamundi Hill: 1001 Steps...* Harper Pub 2004. ISBN 9780060750473

There are also **Electronic Readings (ER#1-30)**, pdf selections from classical texts, scholarly articles and short stories on Hinduism, available on **OAKS** under **RELS 245**, which registered students can access after they login to [MyCharleston](http://my.cofc.edu) (<http://my.cofc.edu>). Please **download all pdf files** onto your computer or a memory stick, **print out each article**, and bring it to class on the day that it is due. You should **read the assignment before** we study the topic in class. This will help you understand the lectures or VoiceThread on it. We pay close attention to these readings in class and “unpack” their content.

OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted.

This course presumes no previous experience in Hinduism, but it has as a prerequisite the desire to read challenging and unusual materials about Hinduism and to engage in conversation about these readings. These expectations are explicitly identified as course requirements in the following points.

Course Requirements

- Attendance Policy**

The COVID-19 pandemic requires a flexible approach to handling student absence. Students are not required to provide medical documentation of illness as in past semesters. Instead, you will be responsible for reporting directly to me the reasons for all absences including but not limited to personal illness, COVID-related illness, a requirement that you isolate or quarantine, or the need to care for a family member who is ill due to COVID. For students who become ill or indicate a need to quarantine or isolate themselves, I will determine reasonable accommodations based on course content and expectations.

- Regular participation in class/zoom discussions (10% of grade)**

Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. Please come to class (whether on Zoom or in person) with ideas and questions that can help our class engage in meaningful discussion. You cannot participate if you are not present. Quality counts more than quantity, but you must speak and post your contributions on discussion threads to contribute. If you are worried about participation, meet with me (by email, or Zoom, or during office hours) as soon as possible to strategize. There is a rubric posted in Class Resources on OAKS to clarify how participation grades are calculated.

- Weekly Reflection Cards due once we resume face-to-face classes (10% of grade)**

Every class marked **RC# due** you are to bring to class a thoughtful written reflection and/or question related to the assigned reading for that week. The reflection should be written or typed on a 3x5 or 5x7 index card and be based on an issue that you have found thought provoking, challenging, or interesting. Questions should not simply ask for factual information, but raise questions of interpretation, while your reflections should explore significant issues or express concerns about the topic that are important to you.

Grades for RC are: + = 100 √+ = 90 √ = 80 √- = 75 — = 70

- Midterm and Final Exam (15% each, or 30% of grade)**

These two exams consist of short answer questions and identification and explanation of scriptural passages that we have discussed in class. An unexcused missed exam counts as a **0**. Review sheets will be provided beforehand and the exam will be open book but timed at 75 or 90 minutes.

- 3 Short Essays** (two 2 pp. essays worth **10%**; one 3 pp. essay worth **15%** for **35%** of grade)

These essays will be based upon assigned topics and may not exceed two or three pages each. The first paper will focus on an Indian story about a hunter and a sage and it's due on **9/10**; the second paper will be based upon the stories in *Climbing Chamundi Hill* and it's due on **9/24** in class; the third paper (3 pp. in length) will be based on *Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God* and you will have a choice of topics, one due on **10/22**, the other due **10/29**. *Late papers are not accepted* since the topic will be discussed in class.

- Creative Project or UnEssay** due **11/19** (**15%** of grade)

For this project you will creatively adapt key themes from the course into a new form of media. The project will include a creator's statement that explains what you sought to accomplish, the sources that inform your project (a Hindu sacred text or a key idea like *karma*, *dharma*, *yoga*, or *ahimsa*), and how you reinterpret them. *Climbing Chamundi Hill* and *Searching for the Blue-Skinned God* can serve as inspiration for your own creative adaptation of Hindu stories, ideals in sacred texts, or religious themes.

Grading Scale: A = 100-93 A- = 92-90 B+ = 89-87 B = 86-83 B- = 82-80 C+ = 79-77
C = 76-73 C- = 72-70 D+ = 69-67 D = 66-63 D- = 62-60 F = 59-below

Academic Integrity

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student's action are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by me as the instructor. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a **XXF grade** in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student's transcript for two years. If you are unfamiliar with the **Honor Code** or what **plagiarism** is, please click on the links.

Course Resources

I encourage you to utilize the academic support services offered by the [**Center for Student Learning**](#) and the [**Writing Lab**](#) for assistance in study strategies and essay writing consultation. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information on the Center for Student Learning call **843.953.5635**. Here is a link for help on writing an essay for [**Religious Studies**](#).

Universal Learning and SNAP program: I am committed to the principle of universal learning. This means that our classroom, our virtual spaces, our practices and our interactions be as inclusive as possible. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen carefully are crucial to universal learning. Any student eligible for or needing accommodations because of a disability is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class or as soon as the student has been approved for services so that reasonable accommodations can be made. For more information on the SNAP program, see: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu> or **843.953.1431**

Religious Observances and Accommodation

The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths that have various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. Religious observances will be accommodated. If you need to be absent for any given class for a specific observance, please submit requests in writing to me by the end of the second week of class (September 3) so we can agree upon accommodations.

Recording of Classes (via Zoom)

Class sessions will be recorded via both voice and video recording. By attending and remaining in this class, the student consents to being recorded. Recorded class sessions are for instructional use only and may not be shared with anyone who is not enrolled in the class.

Continuity of Learning in a Hybrid Class that Meets First Online, Then Face-to-Face, Then Online
Due to social distancing requirements, this class will include a variety of online and technology enhanced components to reinforce continuity of learning for all enrolled students. Before the **drop/add deadline** on **8/31**, students should decide whether the course plan described here matches their own circumstance. Our class will **begin online** for the first three weeks, and then conclude online after Thanksgiving, which offers us some flexibility but we will still have a schedule to follow. Because I will not be lecturing face-to-face during the four weeks that we are online (between August 25-September 10, and in December), it is **imperative** that you read all the required texts for each lesson, read the lecture notes and listen to the VoiceThread, and make use of the additional resources provided to you. Then, you will be prepared to engage in the discussion threads related to that lesson. Also, keep in mind that the first writing assignment will have to be completed in **VERY short order!**

Our classes will **meet face-to-face** from 9/15 to 11/24, when you will submit weekly **Reflection Cards** rather than post your thoughts on discussion threads. However, it is possible that our class will be interrupted by inclement weather; after all, it is hurricane season right now! And so, it is likely that storms will force us to cancel and/or make up one or more class days this semester. Since we know neither the day nor the hour a storm will strike, the first thing to say is be prepared and stay safe. As far as our class is concerned, get your books ASAP, so you have them. If and when classes are canceled/rescheduled, please pay close attention to your CofC email.

If in-person classes are suspended due to Hurricane or the health pandemic, I will announce on OAKS and by your CofC email address a detailed plan for a change of modality to ensure continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and internet access. But **how should we behave online?** What is proper network etiquette or **Netiquette**?

Here's some Netiquette and Protocols for our course

Because online communication often lacks the body language and nonverbal cues we're used to in a normal face-to-face course, it is important to set some expectations for each other in this brave new world we're embarking on.

- Be patient and forgiving. Go easy on each other. We all make mistakes. We're learning. I have had some training in online course delivery, but there will be some glitches.
- Be kind. Treat each other with the full respect and dignity each of you deserve.
- Be ethical. Racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and/or any language or behavior that dehumanizes or degrades others will not be tolerated. Period.
- Take the time to learn the OAKS, Zoom, and VoiceThread. If you don't know how to do something, use the [CofC tutorials here](#) to teach yourself before you ask.
- Think and reread before you post (hit enter/reply). Once up, you can't go back.
- Use proper capitalization/punctuation when writing online and keep in mind how people will read what you write. For example, ALL CAPS IS LIKE YELLING!!!
- When you attend a Zoom session for our course (whether it is an office hours session with me or a scheduled online session as a class), please try to call from a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, dress appropriately, and be aware of your surroundings. Remember, whatever your webcam sees, EVERYONE sees!



A [Hindu goddess of contagion](#) to ward off COVID-19
We might need Her from September 14 until Thanksgiving!

Reading Schedule, Lecture and Discussion Topics

Since our first 3 weeks will take place online, when we will have some **synchronous classes** on Zoom, there are 6 Lesson Plans with a list of major questions to consider, reading assignments, & Zoom classes.

I. Ways of Studying Hinduism and Vedic Religion: Mind Shattering Experiences

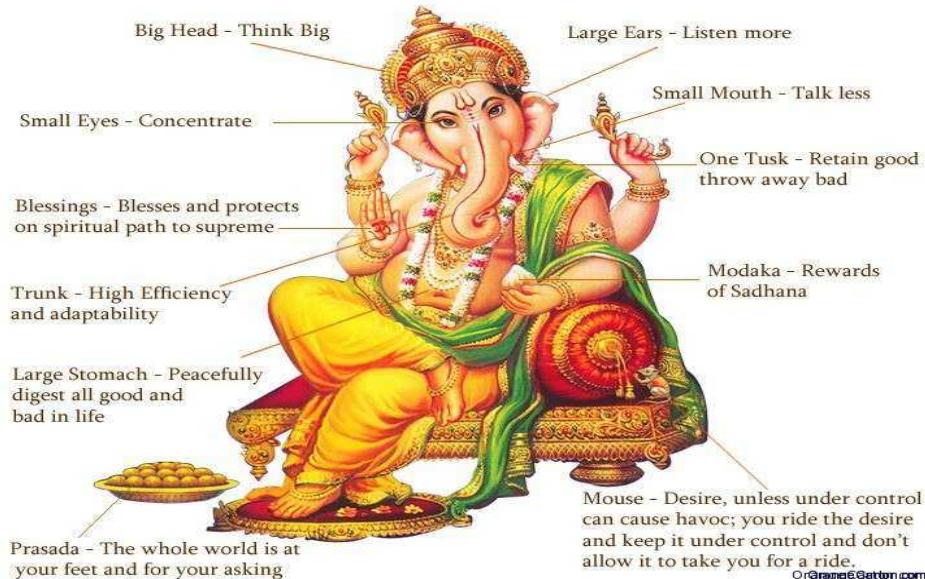
Gargi, Hinduism's earliest female philosopher, probes deeply into the nature of reality. The great sage Yajñavalkya admonishes her: ***Don't ask too many questions, Gargi, or your head will shatter apart!*** In this course, asking questions—of the readings, the professor, one another, and oneself—is encouraged as part of the learning process; a shattered head is a necessary risk, as Gargi knows. Just remember that all answers are bound to be imperfect and subject to revision as you acquire new knowledge and perspectives on Hinduism. ***So be prepared to feel confused sometimes;*** studying Hinduism can both expand and shatter your mind.

8/25 Lesson 1: *Course Organization and Introducing Hinduism in the Life of Pi*

- **Reading:** Review Syllabus, *Life of Pi* document on “Screening Belief”
- **Assignment:** Read Syllabus, Listen to VoiceThread on it, Watch *Life of Pi* clip

8/27 Lesson 2: *Who Speaks for Hinduism? Insiders vs. Outsiders and the Problem of “Hinduism”*

- **Major questions** for discussion thread and Zoom class discussion: What are the advantages and disadvantages of understanding Hinduism as an “outsider” scholar vs. an “insider” devotee? If “Hinduism” is a word coined by the British, how did this new *-ism* distort how westerners have understood it as a religion? How does paying attention to all “five strands” of Hinduism (in ER#2) help correct western distorted views?
- **Reading:** ER#1-3: The Scholar & the Devotee; The Term *Hinduism*; Introduction: Varanasi
- **Assignment:** Read ER#1-3 first, then review the Notes and VoiceThread on these articles
 - Post to Lesson 2 thread by **12:01 am** before Zoom class later in the morning
 - Participate in Zoom class scheduled during regular course time (begins at 10:55 am)



9/1 Lesson 3: *How is Hinduism like Elephant? An Insider Explains “Why I am a Hindu”*

- **Major questions:** In ER#4A the blind men & elephant parable is retold three times but each time new or different meanings are revealed. What are the parable’s meanings? If the elephant is a metaphor for “Hinduism,” what does this assume about its nature as a religion? Why might the

RELS 245 The Hindu Tradition (Fall 2020)

Hindu “insider” view (in ER#4B) appeal to people today who call themselves “spiritual but not religious” but not to Hindu nationalists who call themselves the “true Hindus?”

- **Reading:** ER#4A and #4B: The Blind Men & the Elephant; Why I Am a Hindu
- **Assignment:** Read ER#4A and #4B first, then review Notes and VoiceThread on #4B
 - Watch and Listen to YouTube clips on Natalie Merchant and Shashi Tharoor
 - Post to Lesson 3 thread by **12:01 am** before Zoom class @ 10:55 am

9/3 Lesson 4: *Vedic Sacrificial Ritual: Magic, Religion, or Science?*

- **Major questions:** Why do we try to understand religion by turning to its origins? What kinds of patterns emerge from the hidden connections in Vedic ritual? Do these correspondences seem “magical” (and primitive) or “religious” (and supernatural) or “scientific” (and realistic) to you?
- **Reading:** ER#5-6: Sacred Knowledge & Indian Origins; Vedic Rituals
- **Assignment:** Read ER#5-6 first, then read Notes and listen to VoiceThread on these readings
 - Watch clips from *Altar of Fire*
 - Post to Lesson 4 thread by **12:01 am** before Zoom class @ 10:55 am

9/8 Lesson 5: *The Creation of the Hindu Universe: Cosmic Order, Hierarchy, and Caste*

Major questions: Why are creation & destruction linked in the story of Purusha’s sacrifice? How does this sacrifice create patterns of resemblance and principles of order in the cosmos? Consider the hierarchical structure of the “castes” (*varna*) as an expression of cosmic order—what are the social ramifications for understanding caste hierarchy as completely natural?

- **Reading:** ER#7-8: The Creative Power of the Sacrifice; Creation in Rig Veda
- **Assignment:** Read ER#7-8 first, review Notes and VoiceThread on Origins of the Caste System
 - Post to Lesson 5 thread by **12:01 am** before Zoom class @ 10:55 am

9/10 Lesson 6: *Getting Inside the Head of a Hindu Sage: What does the Sage See?*



Reading: ER#9-10: The Creative Power of the Sacrifice; Creation in Rig Veda

- **Assignment:** ER#9-10 carefully, locate quotes for each essay prompt, and outline your essay
 - **Write a two-page essay** and upload it to the Dropbox on OAKS by **10:45 am**
- Essay #1:** ER#10 presents a Hindu myth about a hunter and a sage, and Doniger suggests that the sage can be interpreted as a metaphor for academic scholars of religion. What does she mean when she writes: “The hunting sage is my idea of the right sort of historian of religion?” *Should scholars use both their “heads” and their “hearts” in order to both think and feel with the myths of others? Why does she criticize scholars who study others’ myths in order to promote them as “true stories?”*
- Zoom class when we will discuss ER#9-10 and the essay topic

RELS 245 The Hindu Tradition (Fall 2020)

Classes hereafter will meet on campus in ECTR 103 at 10:50 am. Please read assignment before class and bring a **Reflection Card** based on that reading assignment to class when you see **RC due**.

II. The Classical Hindu Worldview: Karma & Rebirth; Dreams, Illusions, and Reality

“It’s an illusionary world; it exists only in *maya* (“illusion”). That is why you are not seeing it. You are spiritually so superior that your vision passes right through that world. Perhaps,” she suggested, “you should try to remember how such a world might have appeared to you in the past.” She was right—it worked. I could now see her world, as though in a dream. “The Girl in the Stone” from *Climbing Chamundi Hill: 1001 Steps with a Storyteller and a Reluctant Pilgrim*

- 9/15 Stories about Life & Death, Karma & Rebirth

(Read *Climbing Chamundi Hill*: vii-57) Clips from *Shortcut to Nirvana* (2004) **RC#1 due**

Discussion topics: How would you describe the relationship between the American biologist and the Hindu storyteller as they discuss his stories? What do these stories and their metaphors teach us about karma and samsara? Why and how is Vedic sacrificial ritual criticized in some stories?

- 9/17 Exploring Illusion & Reality with a Hindu Storyteller

(Read *Climbing Chamundi Hill*: 57-109). Clips from *Shortcut to Nirvana* (2004) shown in class

Discussion topics: Are the stories told by the Indian guide “religious” or “secular” stories? Do any of these stories evoke feelings of *déjà vu* in you? How might a Hindu explain this common experience of *déjà vu*? What does it mean to have a “rigid sense of self?” Do the stories represent women as “types” who become sensuous “obstacles” to enlightenment or are they male “projections” of familiar experiences?

- 9/22 Yoga as Philosophy and Practice, Pain and Asceticism

(Read ER#11: The Yoga Sutra; *Climbing Chamundi Hill*: 131-146; 157-172; 182-196) **RC#2 due**

Discussion topics: What is the relationship of spirit and matter, or mind and body, in *The Yoga Sutra*? How does close examination of the mind-body relationship reveal why people construct false identities and enslave themselves to a world of pain? Is the pain felt in the American’s feet or his back real or imagined?

- 9/24 Spiraling Stories about Shiva, Samsara and Moksha

(Read *Climbing Chamundi Hill*: 197-246)

Essay #2: The stories told in *Climbing Chamundi Hill* seem to spiral in cycles, both structurally with stories inside stories, and thematically with twin themes of karma & yoga, death & rebirth, asceticism & eroticism, samsara & moksha. *Explore how this spiraling structure blurs the boundary between fiction and reality, between storyteller and character, and between subjectivity and reality. What profound religious insights does the American “pilgrim” learn about such cycles and his own life from the stories told to him?*

III. The Synthesis of Traditions: Devotion and Worship

“Keep your mind on me, be my devotee, sacrificing, bow to me—you will come to me, I promise, for you are dear to me. Relinquishing all sacred duties to me, make me your only refuge; do not grieve for I shall free you from all evils.” Krishna imploring Arjuna to worship Him in the *Bhagavad Gita* chapter 18: 65-66

- 9/29 The Three Paths of Action, Knowledge, and Devotion in the *Bhagavad Gita*

(ER#12: Obligation, Liberation, and Devotion; clip of Tulsi Gabbard on the Gita) **RC#3 due**

Discussion topics: What is Arjuna’s ethical dilemma at the outset of the *Gita*? Do you find Krishna’s arguments that urge Arjuna to fight compelling? How does the *Gita* resolve the tension found in earlier forms of Hinduism between the worldly pursuit of Dharma and the transcendental pursuit of Moksha? How might a CofC student apply the “Yoga of Action” (*karma yoga*) to RELS classes like this one?



10/1 Seeing the Gods: Darshan

(ER#13: Seeing the Sacred)

Discussion topics: What did you find most surprising in this chapter on how Hindus “see” the sacred? What are some of the cultural and religious obstacles that have kept so many western “outsiders” from seeing like a Hindu and understanding devotion to Hindu gods? Explain in your own words the main differences between the west’s “monotheism of consciousness” and Hindu “polycentrism” and “pluralism.”

10/6 Crafting Images of the Gods and the Sensuous Experience of Devotion

(ER#14-15: The Maker of Idols; The Experience: Approaching God) **RC#4 due**

Discussion topics: ER#14 begins by quoting an artist, who makes bronze statues of the Hindu gods: “The gods created man, but he we are so blessed that we—simple men as we are—help to create the gods.” Is the artist’s construction of divine images inspired by his creativity and his own unique personality? Why do Hindus bathe, dress, feed, and put to sleep at night their images of the gods? What spiritual needs are met through a form of worship that engages all the senses?

10/8 **Midterm Exam in class**

(No reading, review Midterm Exam Review Sheet)



IV. Retelling the *Ramayana* and Its Impact on Modern India

“Imagine a story that is the *Odyssey*, Aesop’s fables, *Romeo and Juliet*, the Bible, and *Star Wars* all at the same time. Imagine a story that combines adventure and aphorism, romance and religion, fantasy and philosophy. Imagine a story that makes young children marvel, burly men weep, and old women dream. Such a story exists in India, and it is called the *Ramayana*.... How relevant is this ancient epic now? A two-year serialization of the *Ramayana* was the most widely viewed television program in Indian history. But the story’s importance goes beyond mere popularity. The issues that dominate this Sanskrit saga are the same issues that dominate modern India.” Jonah Blank in his “Preface” to *Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God*

RELS 245 The Hindu Tradition (Fall 2020)

- 10/13 Introducing the *Ramayana* and Ayodhya: Mythmaking in Modern India
(*Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God* chapter 1: Beginnings; ER#16: Militant Hinduism) **RC#5 due**
Discussion topics: How is the controversy over Rama's birthplace used to create Hindu identity? Does this Hindutva identity seem new and modern or ancient and anti-modern to you? When "tolerance" is invoked by nationalists as a distinctly Hindu virtue, does this reinforce "Hindu exceptionalism"? Can you imagine any reasonable resolution to Hindu-Muslim conflict in Ayodhya, or does the "illogical" quality of religion that Blank underscores make any resolution to the conflict seem impossible?
- 10/15 Fate, Duty and Kingship
(*Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God* chapter 2: pp. 25-33, 42-50; chapter 3: Kings)
Discussion topics: Is the idea of "fate" or "destiny," or the practices of palm readers and astrologers, compatible with the Hindu doctrine of karma? How is the traditional model of kingship reinforced by the religious and ethical values of Dharma and Artha, caste roles and filial piety? How do you respond to the unflattering comparison of India's democracy with America's democracy?
- 10/20 Caste Hierarchy, Purity and Pollution Taboos
(*Arrow of Blue-Skinned God* chapter 5: Caste; ER#17: "The Inner Experience of Caste") **RC#6**
Discussion topics: Has the caste system promoted stability, pluralism, and diversity-in-unity in India? Does the Indian government's affirmative action program for "scheduled castes" promote or undermine India's unity and the quest for equality? According to ER#17, what is the social and psychological explanation for how the caste system and judgments about what is "polluted" become ingrained in children? Is race in the US "the visible agent of the unseen force of caste" so that "caste is the bones, race the skin?"
- 10/22 Debating Reality and Illusion, Good & Evil in the *Ramayana*
(*Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God* chapters 6-7: Illusion, Evil)
Essay topic #3a: Respond to the following statement: "How could Rama, the very personification of good, commit an act of evil? How could Ravana, the Lord of the Demons, behave like a true gentleman? These are questions that Indians debate every day, at the dinner table, at the temple, at the tea hut near the village well. Truck-driver philosophers and seamstress theologians come up with many explanations, but never with an answer. There is no answer. Good and evil are not the separate entities we would like to believe." Explain how Blank reaches this conclusion. Do you agree? Is the relativist view that Blank presents here compatible with Hindu Dharma?
- V. Questioning Race & Gender Roles, Cultural Appropriation, Sexuality & Mysticism**
"Growing up I had a rather ambivalent relationship toward the *Ramayana* and the prescriptions it offered for idealized female behavior... It was with some reluctance, then, that I was forced to engage with some of the *Ramayana*'s complexities at the insistence of my five-year-old daughter who had been introduced to the online version of *Sita Sings the Blues* by a family friend.... She began asking questions such as, "Why was Ram mean to Sita when they came back from the forest?" and "Why didn't he think she was pure?" Confronted with my daughter's questions, I began paying closer attention to Paley's film and grew to appreciate the critical insights it offered into several of the *Ramayana*'s central themes." Sharmila Lodhia, "Deconstructing Sita's Blues: Questions of Mis/representation and Feminist Critique in Paley's *Ramayana*"
- 10/27 The Role of Race in the *Ramayana* and in Hindu Comic Books
(*Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God* chapter 8: Race; chapter 10: pp. 263-270; ER#18: The Dark Side of the Comics that Redefined Hinduism) Clip from *Of Gods and Men* (2015) **RC#7 due**
Discussion topics: Blank writes: "India is more of a conglomeration than a country, a hodgepodge of hundreds of cultures, languages, and peoples held together only by an idea. I'm not sure just what that idea is." What are some values and practices that bind Indians together to form "Hinduism" and "Indian-ness"? What racial stereotypes are present in the *Ramayana* and in the Hindu comic books described in ER#18?
- 10/29 Duty vs. Desire: Sita as the Ideal Hindu Wife
(*Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God* chapters 11-12: Love, Endings; ER#19: Yes to Sita, No to Ram)
Essay topic #3b: Blank writes: "To follow the path of Sita is to live vicariously through one's mate.

The highest piety of a woman (such a view holds) is to serve her husband. A man gains virtue by action, a woman by helping her man to act.” *What ideals does Sita stand for? How are Blank’s comments undermined by the testimony of both Indian women and men in ER#19 and by the Ramayana’s conclusion? How might Sita’s story serve as a source of inspiration for women who seek independence rather than servile submission to their husbands?*

11/3 **No class. Don’t forget to vote!**



11/5 Sita’s Story Retold in a Melancholy Mode as Feminist Critique

(ER#20: Deconstructing Sita’s Blues) Film: *Sita Sings the Blues* (Nina Paley, 2008) **RC#8 due**

Discussion topics: After reading ER#20 and viewing the film, do you feel sympathy for its critics or sympathy for those Hindus who celebrate it as a “wonderful way to keep Hindu mythology alive?” Did you feel discomfort with any scenes that “desecrated” this story, or that “tainted” the image of Rama (as American Hindus Against Defamation have claimed)? Does the charge that Nina Paley engaged in “cultural appropriation” ring true to you?

11/10 What Happens When God Appears as a Woman? Is the Hindu Goddess a Feminist?

(ER#21-22: Anandamayi Ma: God Came as a Woman; Is the Hindu Goddess a Good Resource?)

Clips from film: *When God Was a Girl: Divine Women*

Discussion topics: Why and how did Hallstrom (ER#21) learn to question and transcend the categories of “woman” and “saint” in her research on Anandamayi Ma, who devotees considered to be God the Mother? Why is it so difficult to import goddess worship from another culture? Why is it important not to overlook the women in India for whom the goddess (Devi) is a living reality?

11/12 Worship of the Goddess Kali in India and in the New Age West

(ER#23-24: New Age Hinduism; A Garland of Talking Heads for the Goddess) **RC#9 due**

Discussion topics: When considering who can speak with authority about Hinduism, why is “authenticity” so problematic? Do you sympathize with the South Asian students who argue that New Age women who invoke Kali engage in a form of cultural appropriation? Within the Indian social and religious context, does Kali serve as a goddess for oppressed women or as a goddess of male fears and anxieties? Does the desire for Kali to inspire a “heterosexually coded male mysticism” (ER#24) seem plausible or not?

11/17 The Mystical Experience of a Western Scholar vs. Ramakrishna’s Vision of Kali

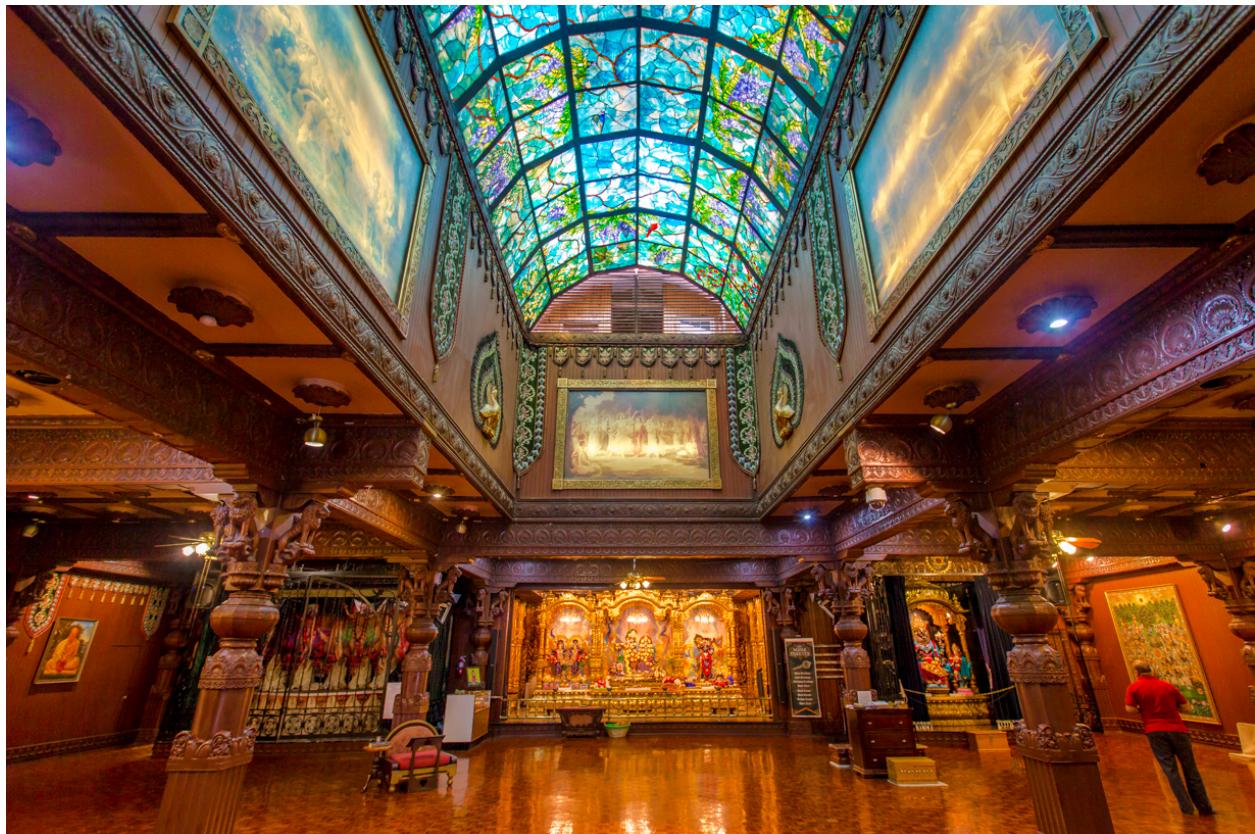
(ER#25: Excerpts from *Secret Body*)

Discussion topics: Why do you think sexuality—whether it is being restrained or celebrated—is so important in religious experience and practice? Does Kripal’s experience of Kali during “that Night” dissolve the boundary between “outsider” vs. “insider?” Why does he claim that “there is no way that the robust study of religion can be comfortably aligned with religion itself.” Do you agree that the responses to *Kali’s Child* reflect “transference phenomena” and “orientalist” beliefs about India?

VI. Hinduism and Hindus in the US

“Europe discovers. India beckons. Isn’t that so? India sits atop her lily pad through centuries, lost in contemplation of the horizon. And, from time to time, India is discovered.”—Richard Rodriguez, *Days of Obligation*. “India.” Quoted in Reetika Vazirani, “The Art of Breathing” “So many of us look to the wisdom of the east to solve our problems in the west.” Vikram Gandhi, *Kumaré*

- 11/19 Vivekananda Introduces Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago
 (ER#26: Swami Vivekananda’s Speeches at the World Parliament of Religions) **Unessay due!**
Discussion topics: Is belief that all religions point to the same God a necessary condition for religious harmony? Or should religious folks learn to live in harmony in spite of disagreements? What is the proper relationship of the One and the Many for Vivekananda? What are the ethical and social consequences of his views? How is Vivikananda’s vision of religious traditions hierarchical?
- 11/24 Hindu Reformers in America and Sacred Sites in the States
 (ER#27-28: Hinduism in America; The Accidental Pilgrim) **RC#10 due**
Discussion topics: Westernization has had a profound impact on how Hindus have transformed and reformed their religion. Do you think Western influence has been primarily positive or negative? Does the aesthetic appeal of New Vrindaban account for how “magical” and “numinous” it felt to Fuller? Does the “Disneyesque” quality of the site help you to grasp its sacred power? Does its *simulacra* quality make the foreign more familiar or does the site’s “exotic otherness” have some romantic appeal?



Shri Shri Radha Vrindaban Chandra Mandir, in the Hare Krishna “Palace of Gold” in West Virginia

- 11/26 Thanksgiving---give thanks and eat turkey (or tofurkey).

Our last two classes will resume online

12/1 Penultimate Lesson: *Branding Yoga and Telling the Story of Guru Kumaré*

- **Major questions:** How does the type of yoga introduced by Vikram Gandhi's alter-ego, Kumaré, both conform to and differ from the yoga "branding" described in ER#29? Does Gandhi "make up" a new religion or does he draw upon symbols, practices, and ideas about "illusion" that are recognizably Hindu? How does the film problematize any claim about what "authentic" yoga is?
- **Reading:** ER#29: Branding Yoga
- **Assignment:**
 - Read ER#29 first, then review Notes on *Kumaré* and listen to VoiceThread
 - Watch *Kumaré: The True Story of a False Prophet* (2012), part I
 - Post comments on Discussion Thread by 12:01 am
 - Zoom class to discuss *Kumaré* part I at 10:55 am



Kumaré Guiding a Meditation on the Visualization of Blue Light

12/3 Last Lesson: *Yoga, Exoticism, and Race in America*

Major questions: Vazirani (in ER#30) describes her "outsider" status as an awkward Hindu girl growing up brown in the US in the 1970s. Does her critique of American culture ring true to you, or does she perpetuate stereotypes about American culture? What stereotypes do Americans associate with India? Does Vazirani's critique of "power yoga" resonate with Vikram Gandhi's critique of the yoga industry?

- **Reading:** ER#30: The Art of Breathing
- **Assignment:**
 - Read ER#30 first, then review Notes on it and listen to VoiceThread
 - Watch *Kumaré: The True Story of a False Prophet* (2012), part II
 - Post comments on Discussion thread
 - Join our last Zoom class as we wrap up the semester

12/10 Final Exam Online from 8:00-10:00 am

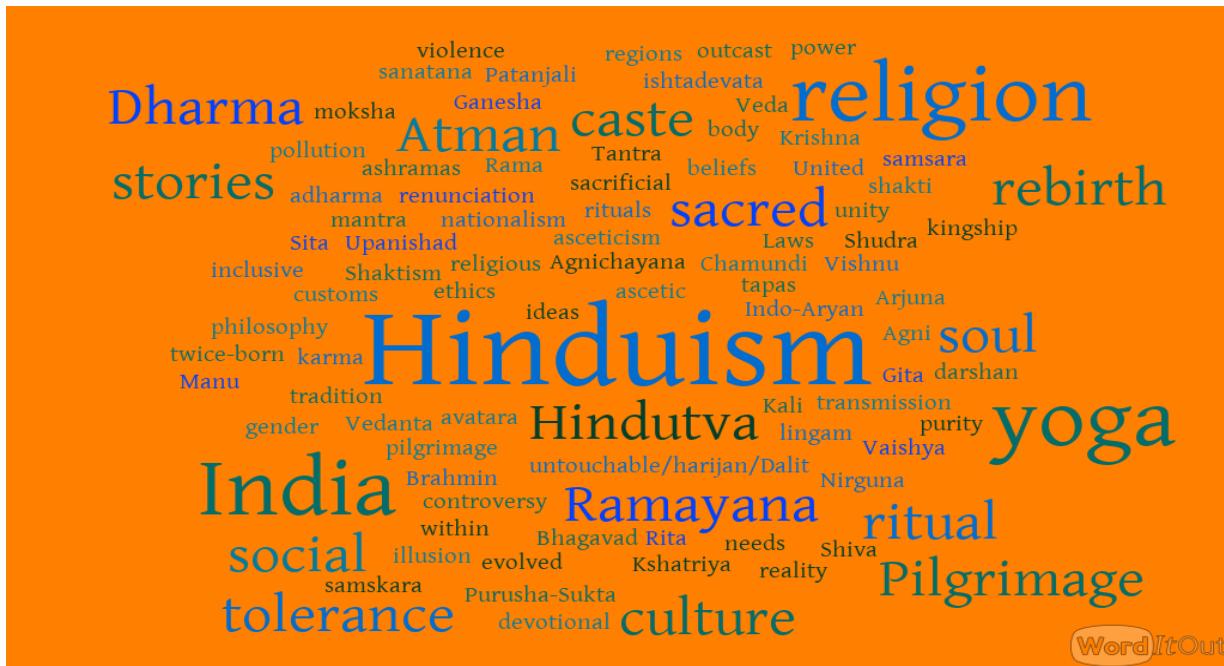


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RELS 245 The Hindu Tradition (Fall 2020)

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Terms for the Study of Hinduism

The study of an Asian religion like Hinduism is a lot like studying a foreign language: gaining “religious literacy” occurs after acquiring a new vocabulary as well as mastering the “grammar” of that religion (or the seven interrelated dimensions of the Hindu religion). Below are terms that you need to know in order to do well on exams. Keep this list handy as you read the assignments and write down their meanings.

Terms used in the academic study of Hinduism

Insider vs. outsider, five strands of Hinduism, seven dimensions of religion, Orientalism

Metaphors for Hinduism: sponge, jungle, banyan tree, collector, kaleidoscope; syncretism

Magic vs. science vs. religion, apotropaic, sympathetic magic, ethicization, rites of passage

Monism, monotheism, henotheism, pantheism, polytheism, polycentrism, apophatic theology

Orthodoxy vs. Orthopraxy, iconography, aniconic, idolatry, anthropomorphic, “gape” vs. “gaze”

Hermeneutics, numinous, liminal state, ecumenicism

Terms from Hinduism

Hindu/Hindusthan/Hinduism/Hindutva, *sanatana dharma*, Sanskrit, Ganesha

Indo-Aryan controversy, Rig Veda, Rita, Purusha/Prajapati, Agni, bandhu

Purusha-Sukta, 4 Varnas: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra; Dharma, Brahman, mantra

Upanishad, karma, rebirth/transmigration, samsara, Atman = Brahman, moksha, yoga, asceticism

Laws of Manu, 4 *ashramas*, twice-born, outcast: untouchable/harijan/Dalit, purity vs. pollution, diet

Pilgrimage/yatra, samskara, Shiva, Ardhnishvara, lingam, Chamundi

Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, Vedanta, Nirguna vs. Saguna Brahman

Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna, Krishna, Vishnu, adharma, avatara, Paths of Knowledge/Action/Devotion

Bhakti, darshan, aniconic, ishtadevata, puja vs. asceticism, Ramayana, Rama, Sita, Shaktism, Kali,

Tantra Vivekenanda, World Parliament of Religion, "muscular Hinduism," Hindu Nationalism

Pizza effect,” “branding yoga.” Kumare’s “invented yoga” meditation on the blue light

About Me...

I grew up in beautiful Santa Barbara California, went to Reed College in Portland Oregon (where I majored in religion), earned a MA degree in religious studies at UC Santa Barbara, before I moved to Ann Arbor Michigan to pursue degrees in Buddhist Studies (I have a PhD in B.S.!). Since graduating from college, I have spent many years living in monasteries and traveling throughout India, especially in the Himalayan region of North India.

I joined the Department of Religious Studies at CofC in 1999, where I was hired to teach courses in Asian religions (Religion and Society in India and Tibet, Buddhist Tradition, Religions of China and Japan, Sacred Texts of the East, Advanced Topics in Tibetan Buddhism). I have also led study abroad trips to the Indian Himalayas, where I have taught courses on the impact of globalization and spiritual tourism on Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. Now I am excited about the opportunity to teach the Hindu Tradition for the first time.

When not at work, I enjoy watching sports (especially CofC basketball games—go Cougs!), canoeing, biking, and hiking in the mountains, and going on long road trips across the US and Canada.

I believe learning about Asian religions should be “fun” and I have chosen reading material and films that I think you will find illuminating. I expect students to come prepared and make meaningful contributions to our class discussions, whether those take place in class or on Zoom. If you are experiencing challenges that make it difficult for you to do so, I encourage you to meet with me privately so that we can work together to develop a solution.



Introducing CofC Students to the Buddhist Wheel of Life in Ladakh, North India 2016