Introduction to Hinduism

Spring 2014
Stony Brook University
Department of Asian and Asian American Studies
College of Arts and Sciences

AAS/RLS 256: Introduction to Hinduism
Melville Library, Room E4320
Mon/Wed/Fri 9-9:53 A.M.

Course Instructor: Isaac Sussman
Office Hours: Mon/Wed 10-11:30 A.M. and by appointment
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Course Description:

This course provides students with a comprehensive historical introduction to Hindu religious traditions and philosophies. We begin by studying the origins of Hinduism in India in the Indus Valley Civilization and as exemplified in the Rg Veda and the Upanisads. We discuss the ethical teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and well-known myths presented in the Ramayana and in selected Puranas. We investigate the systematization and elaboration of themes in these texts by philosophers of the six orthodox Hindu schools. Moving to the medieval period, we examine the flourishing of the bhakti movement, the increasing influence of tantra, and the worship of the Goddess. We then consider Hindu reform movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, Hindu nationalism, and the global Hindu diaspora. The course will conclude with a modern Indian novel that touches on religious issues.

Course Learning Objectives:

1) The ability to think critically about human beliefs and practices while recognizing both the universality of religion across the globe and throughout history and its contextual specificity.
2) The ability to speak with some familiarity about the history, teachings, and practices of Hinduism.
3) An awareness of the importance and legitimacy of the different perspectives present within Hinduism.
4) An appreciation of both the unity of Hinduism and the diversity of Hindu traditions. This course will require students to read both primary and secondary texts and to assimilate the variety of perspectives expressed therein. Students will have the opportunity to consider the range of beliefs, practices, institutions, and trends that fall under the category of Hinduism.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Make Up Policy: Regular attendance, punctuality, preparation of reading assignments, and class participation are expected in a college level class. Although I will not take attendance during class, attendance will be reflected in your quiz grade—quizzes cannot be made up. Students who regularly make positive contributions to class discussions and display serious engagement with required readings will receive extra credit towards their final grades. Late work will be accepted but points will be taken off for lateness.

Description of Required Readings and Assignments:

Required Texts:

7. E-readings for download on Blackboard (http://blackboard.sunysb.edu/)

Graded Assignments:

Daily quizzes, a mid-term exam, a final exam, and a short essay assignment will be used to evaluate achievement of course outcomes.

Exams:

There will be two exams, a mid-term exam and a final exam. The mid-term exam will be held during class on Friday, March 14. The final exam will be held on Wednesday, May 14 in our classroom from 8:30 to 11 PM.
Grading:

1. Attendance and participation
2. Quizzes (30%)
3. Mid-term exam (30%)
4. Final exam (30%)
5. Short essay (10%)

A = 95-100%
A- = 90-95%
B = 85-90%
B- = 80-85%
C = 75-80%
C- = 70-75%
D = 65-75%
F = 0-65%

**Quizzes.** Students will be administered short quizzes at the beginning of each of our class meetings. The purpose of these quizzes is to confirm that you have attentively read the required assignment for that day’s class. Quizzes may also include material from the previous class’s lecture. The quizzes will be quite straightforward, and should be easy for those who have read the material and paid attention in class. Quizzes cannot be made up; students who are absent or tardy will receive a “0” for the quiz. The worst two quiz grades of the semester will be thrown out in the computation of the class grade.

**Mid-term exam.** This exam will include material covered in readings and lectures for the first half of the course. The exam will be held during class on Friday, March 14.

**Final exam.** This exam will include material covered in readings and lectures for the second half of the course. The exam will be held on Wednesday, May 14 from 8:30 to 11 PM in our classroom.

**Short essay.** Students will be expected to hand in a 5-page, double-spaced essay on one out of several topics, which will be handed out by the end of the first week. This essay will be due no later than class on Friday, April 25.

**Extra Credit.** Students are encouraged to do optional extra-credit assignments. The New York area offers an incredibly rich array of cultural opportunities. The purpose of extra credit is to get you out of the dorm or library and into local Hindu temples, Hinduism-related films, musical performances, museum exhibits, etc., in order to learn about the religion as it is lived. Students must receive approval from the
instructor before undertaking an extra credit project. Each student can receive credit for a maximum of two extra credit assignments during the semester.

**Meeting Schedule:**

**Week 1**

1/27  Introduction to the Course and Introduction to Hinduism  
*Readings:* Flood pp. 1-4

1/29  Introduction to Hinduism Continued  
*Readings:* Flood pp. 5-21

1/31  Indus Valley Civilization  
*Readings:* Flood pp. 22-30

**Week 2**

2/3   Vedic Culture and Ritual  
*Readings:* Flood pp. 30-44, Sarma pp. 5-7

2/5   Vedic Ritual Continued/Film: “Altar of Fire”  
*Readings:* NONE

2/7   Rg Veda  
*Readings:* Flood pp. 44-50, Sarma pp. 9-23

**Week 3**

2/10  Renunciation in Ancient India  
*Readings:* Flood pp. 75-102

2/12  Upanisads  
*Readings:* Sarma pp. 24-54

2/14  Upanisads Continued  
*Readings:* Sarma pp. 54-68

**Week 4**

2/17  Overview of Dharma  
*Readings:* Flood pp. 51-74

2/19  Dharma Texts  
*Readings:* Sarma pp. 222-245
2/21  Dharma Texts Continued
   *Readings:* Sarma pp. 245-281

Week 5

2/24  Ramayana
   *Readings:* Flood pp. 103-109, Narayan pp. xxiii-xxviii, 3-73

2/26  Ramayana Continued
   *Readings:* Narayan pp. 74-157

2/28  Film: “Sita Sings the Blues”
   *Readings:* NONE

Week 6

3/3   “Sita Sings the Blues” Continued/Mahabharata
   *Readings:* NONE

3/5   Bhagavad Gita
   *Readings:* Flood pp. 124-127, Patton pp. 3-100

3/7   Bhagavad Gita Continued
   *Readings:* Patton pp. 101-205

Week 7

3/10  Temple Culture
   *Readings:* Blurton pp. 56-75 (E-reading)

3/12  Review for Midterm
   *Readings:* NONE

3/14  **Midterm Exam**

Week 8

3/24  Puranas

3/26  Puranas Continued
   *Readings:* Sarma pp. 180-196

3/28  The Bhakti Movement
   *Readings:* Flood pp. 128-147, Sarma pp. 210-221
Week 9

3/31 Shaivite Bhakti
*Readings:* Ramanujan pp. 61-110

4/2 Shaivite Bhakti Continued
*Readings:* Ramanujan pp. 111-168

4/4 Yoga and Samkhya Philosophy
*Readings:* Flood pp. 224-236, Radhakrishnan (E-readings)

Week 10

4/7 Nyaya and Vaishesika Philosophy
*Readings:* Radhakrishnan (E-readings)

4/9 Mimamsa Philosophy
*Readings:* Flood pp. 236-238, Radhakrishnan (E-reading)

4/11 Vedanta Philosophy
*Readings:* Flood pp. 238-249, Radhakrishnan (E-reading)

Week 11

4/14 The Goddess
*Readings:* Flood pp. 174-197, Sarma pp. 196-200

4/16 Siva and Shakti
*Readings:* NONE

4/18 Tantrism
*Readings:* Flood pp. 148-158, Tantra (E-reading)

Week 12

4/21 Tantrism Continued
*Readings:* Flood pp. 158-173, Tantra (E-reading)

4/23 Hindu Ritual
*Readings:* Flood pp. 198-223

4/25 **Essay Due**
Hindu Reform Movements
*Readings:* Flood pp. 250-261, Sarma pp. 301-320
Week 13

4/28  Hindu Nationalism and Global Hinduism  
      *Readings:* Flood pp. 262-273, Sarma pp. 373-390

4/30  Novel: Samskara  
      *Readings:* Ananthamurthy pp. 3-55

5/2   Samskara Continued  
      *Readings:* Ananthamurthy pp. 59-118

Week 14

5/5   Film: “Samskara”  
      *Readings:* NONE

5/7   “Samskara” Continued  
      *Readings:* NONE

5/9   Review for Final  
      *Readings:* NONE

Week 15

5/14 **Final Exam** (8:30 to 11 PM)

**Class Protocol:**

**Electronic Devices Policy:**

All phones and electronic devices must be silent during our class period. I strongly encourage you to turn off all phones, laptop computers, iPads, etc., during class. This is because a growing body of scientific evidence suggests that the type of multitasking students often engage in during class impairs their ability to acquire and store new information. Although you may turn on your computer intending only to use it to take notes, it is difficult to resist the urge to answer e-mails, visit social networking sites, and surf the web during class.

**Interruptions:**

Please feel free to raise your hand at any point during class. I will try to call on everyone, but I cannot guarantee that there will be enough time.
Class Resources:

Blackboard:

Course syllabus, assignments, and e-readings will be available at blackboard.stonybrook.edu.

Disability Support Services Statement:

If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services at (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to the following website: http://www.sunysb.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities.shtml

Academic Integrity Statement:

Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person’s work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (School of Health Technology & Management, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/.

Critical Incident Management:

Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students’ ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures.