

RLST 100: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION (Spring 2014)
TR 1:40-2:55pm
Linfield Hall 301

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Office Hours: Tues. and Thurs. 9-10am & by appt.
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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course introduces students to the academic study of religion by surveying the major religions of the South Asian subcontinent. It pays particular attention to how religion in South Asia has provided for the pleasures of debate, argument, and discussion— for philosophical speculation, political contest, and deliberative reason. We will take one particular debate as the starting point and organizing principle for our semester-long inquiry into the diversity of South Asian (and also world) religion. In the 1570s and 80s, the Indian emperor Akbar hosted a series of meetings among learned representatives of his kingdom’s different religious traditions. Akbar was a Muslim, and his congress of religions began as a conversation among representatives of the different strands of Islam. It was soon joined, however, by representatives of India’s other religious communities, notably Hinduism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. Following Akbar, our study of religion in South Asia will cover each of these traditions in turn, adding two other traditions (Buddhism and Judaism) from the margins of Akbar’s empire and one (Sikhism) that was taking shape within it. The course equips students with basic cultural literacy in these eight religious traditions and also introduces students to key methodological issues in the academic study of religion.



COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To acquire basic religious literacy in the major traditions of South Asia
- To develop familiarity with basic methods and concepts in religious studies
- To think critically about the task of “representing” religion

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- **70% Exams** (5% Geography Quiz; 20% each for two Midterms; 25% Final): Examinations will cover material from lectures and assigned readings.
- **15% Religion Scavenger Hunts:** Two “scavenger hunt” activities will ask students to develop a wide factual knowledge about two different religious traditions. See course handout for additional instructions.
- **15% Petition to the Emperor:** Your final written assignment for the course will be a petition to the emperor Akbar, written from the perspective of a fictional historical character of your own devising. You want Akbar to invite you to Agra as an official representative of your religion. The assignment consists of two parts: a sketch of three possible characters (5%) and a petition written from the perspective of one of those (10%).

COURSE POLICIES:

- **Academic Dishonesty:** Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. All references to ideas from books, articles, or other sources must be cited correctly. If you do not know how to properly reference your work, or you are in doubt whether or not you should cite material, refer to the *Student Academic and Conduct Guidelines*, or make an appointment to see the instructor to discuss the problem. Any student caught cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise engaged in academic dishonesty will fail the course and be reported to the Dean of Students.
- **Discussion Guidelines:** Religion is by nature a contentious subject matter, and thus promises to keep our conversations lively. Our task in this class will be to analyze religion as a cultural phenomenon, not to tout our own beliefs or disparage those of others. Critical thinking is a must, and it is likewise imperative that everyone approach religious texts and traditions with appropriate respect.
- **Support Services:** Montana State University provides a variety of services to ensure that you thrive, academically and otherwise. If you have a particular physical or learning disability that requires special accommodation, please contact both me *and* the Office of Disability, Re-Entry, and Veterans Services (180 Strand Union Building; x2824). Otherwise, if you think that a health problem, a family emergency, or some other life event will adversely affect your academic performance, you should contact the Dean of Students for support (174 Strand Union Building; x2826).
- **Late Papers and Assignments:** All assignments should be turned in on time. If an assignment is turned in late, its final grade will be lowered by one letter per day. Thus, the highest possible grade for a paper turned in one day late would be a B. Papers turned in one minute after the deadline will be considered a full day late. Extensions on papers will not be granted unless arrangements have been made at least one week in advance. You must likewise arrange to take make-up exams at least one week in advance, unless you can prove a documented emergency.
- **Writing Guidelines:** Good writing is revised writing. The best writers generate multiple drafts and enlist the help of readers in order to produce a smooth final product: you are no exception. A top-level paper will not only demonstrate technical mastery (i.e. it will be devoid of grammatical and stylistic errors); it will also possess a clear organizational scheme that bolsters its major argument.
- **Grades:** Grades will be posted on the university’s “Desire 2 Learn” (D2L) website.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, eds., *Religions of South Asia* (Routledge)

Mahmood Jalal, ed., *Islamic Mystical Poetry* (Penguin)

Barbara Stoler Miller, trans., *Bhagavad Gita* (Bantam)

Arvind Mehrotra, trans., *Songs of Kabir* (NYRB)

N.B.: All required texts are available for purchase in the campus bookstore. On the schedule of readings, articles posted to electronic course reserves at the library website are indicated by (CR). Readings from *Religions of South Asia* are designated by *RSA*. Readings are to be completed in advance of the date on which they are listed. For guidance in your reading, you should consult the reading questions that will be posted weekly to the library e-reserves website.

ARGUING RELIGION IN SOUTH ASIA

- R 1/9 Preliminaries
- T 1/14 “Traditions of South Asia” (RSA, 1-8)
Amartya Sen, “The Argumentative Indian” (CR)
- R 1/16 “Issues in Interpretation” (RSA, 268-273)
Carl Ernst, “Approaching Islam in Terms of Religion” (CR)
- T 1/21 “Syncretism and Orthodoxy under the Mughals” (CR)
“The Declaration of Akbar’s Status as a Mujtahid” (CR)

GEOGRAPHY QUIZ

- R 1/23 Salman Rushdie, from *The Enchantress of Florence* (CR)
Amita Sarin, *Akbar Birbal*, selections (CR)

ISLAM

- T 1/28 “Indian Muslim Tradition” (RSA, 201-226)
Qur’an 1, 3, and 96 (CR)
- R 1/30 “Indian Muslim Traditions” (RSA, 227-246)
“Studying Hadith in a Madrassa in the early 20th century” (CR)
- T 2/4 *Islamic Mystical Poetry*: Rabia Basri, Mansur Hallaj, Jalaluddin Rumi
- R 2/6 *Islamic Mystical Poetry*: Sa’di Shirazi, Amir Khusrau Dehlavi, Hafiz Shirazi
“Shi’i Mourning in Muharram” (CR)
Due: Scavenger Hunt #1

ZOROASTRIANISM

- T 2/11 “Indian Zoroastrian Tradition” (RSA, 151-166)
Gathas, Yashnas 30 and 32 (CR)
Bundahishn, Ch. 1-3 (CR)
 Mary Boyce, ed., “Prayers” (CR)
- R 2/13 Mary Boyce, ed., “Rules and Observances” (CR)
 J. J. Modi, “Consecration of the Sacred Fires” (CR)
- T 2/18 **EXAM #1**

HINDUISM

- R 2/20 “Hindu Dharma” (RSA, 15-36)
 Diana Eck, “The Deity: The Image of God” (CR)
- T 2/25 “Hindu Dharma” (RSA, 36-50, 57-65)
Law Code of Manu, selections (CR)
- R 2/27 *Bhagavad Gita*, Teachings 1-9
- T 3/4 *Bhagavad Gita*, Teachings 10-18

BUDDHISM

- R 3/6 “Buddha Dharma” (RSA, 103-128)
 Donald Lopez, “A King Gives Away His Head” (CR)
Due: Scavenger Hunt #2
- NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK: 3/10-3/14
- T 3/18 Donald Lopez, “The Ascetic Ideal” and “The Evolution of Ordination” (CR)
 Susan Murcott, “Patacara” (CR)

JAINISM

- R 3/20 “Jaina Dharma” (RSA, 87-101)
 Phyllis Granoff, “Ardrakumara” (CR)
- T 3/25 Umasvati, *Tattvartha Sutra: That Which Is*, selection (CR)
- R 3/27 **EXAM #2**

JUDAISM

- T 4/1 “Indian Judaic Tradition” (RSA, 169-183)
Nathan Katz, “The Jews of Cochin” (CR)
“Selections from Rabbinic Sources” (CR)
- R 4/3 Maria Rosa Menocal, “The Ornament of the World: Beginnings” (CR)
Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, selections (CR)
Due: Character Sketches

CHRISTIANITY

- T 4/8 “Indian Christian Tradition” (RSA, 185-200)
Acts of Thomas, selection (CR)
- R 4/10 Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, First Week (CR)
Catechism of the Council of Trent, selection (CR)

SIKHISM

- T 4/15 “Sikh Dharm” (RSA, 131-148)
Guru Nanak, “Jaap-ji” (CR)
- R 4/17 “The Successors of Guru Nanak” (CR)
Due: Petition to the Emperor

DEBATING RELIGION: REPRISE

- T 4/22 *Songs of Kabir*, pp. vii-xxxii, 1-38
- R 4/24 *Songs of Kabir*, pp. 39-99

- **EXAM #3** will be given during the scheduled final exam period:
April 29, 12:00-1:50pm.