

**Religions of India  
(REL 223)**

Main Street Campus, Priscilla Payne Hurd Academic Complex, 117  
Wednesday, Friday 1:10 pm – 2:20 pm  
Spring 2014

**Instructor:**

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Comenius Center, 205  
Office hours: Wed. 2:30 – 4:00 pm, or by appointment

**Course Description:**

The course reviews major religious traditions of India in a historical perspective in order to understand how the peoples of India imagined their relation to the divine world, to nature, and to other human beings. Considers connections between myths and religious practices, social structures, historical events, and psychological and aesthetic dimensions of Indian cultural life. The primary emphasis will be the examination of the religious diversity and development of Indian religion through its history, literature, and art.

We will begin with a consideration of the most ancient forms of Indian religion, then proceed to the Vedic religion, continuing to early and classical Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Topics will include Vedic pantheon; creation and cosmology; Krishna's teachings in the Bhagavad Gita; Krishna in the Bhagavata Purana, the Gita Govinda, and in painting, poetry, and dance; the Ramayana and its enactments in popular culture and film; Shiva and the sacred city of Banaras; cult the Great Goddess; life of the Buddha and his teaching; Buddhist doctrine and practice; Mahavira Jina and Jainism.

**Course Objectives:**

- to build up an understanding of the historical development of Indian religions;
- to acquire knowledge of the foundational myths, doctrines, and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism;
- to learn to identify and interpret traditional images of the divine beings and mythological scenes and characters;

- to learn to interpret primary sources (such as epics, devotional poetry, and hymns);
- to examine the relationship between religion, mythology, culture, and society.

### **Requirements and Grading:**

Midterm Quiz (1 hour): 15%

Image paper (5-6 pages): 20%

Final Quiz (1 hour): 15%

Final paper (10-12 pages) and presentation: 30%+10%=40%

Discussion participation: 10%

### **Tentative Schedule of Classes:**

Week 1 (Jan. 15, 17):	Course Introduction. Notes on geography and history of India. Timeline. Indus Valley Civilization: reconstructing possible features of its religion.
Week 2 (Jan. 22, 24):	Overview of the Vedic period. Vedic religion. Vedic gods, rituals, and worldview.
Week 3 (Jan. 29, 31):	The “Brahmanic” religion: the Upanishads and later developments. Transition to Classical Hinduism. Myths of worldview: Creation, Space, and Time.
Week 4 (Feb. 5, 7):	Multitude of Hindu Gods. Many gods or one God? Vishnu on the endless serpent. Vishnu and Vishnu’s <i>avatars</i> .
Week 5 (Feb. 12, 14):	Ramayana: Rama and his sacred Duty.
Week 6 (Feb. 19, 21):	Personal god. The Mahabharata. Krishna and the Bhagavad Gita. The concept of Dharma.
Week 7 (Feb. 26, 28):	Bhakti, the divine love. Krishna’s <i>lila</i> . Love song of the Dark Lord.

**Friday, Feb. 28 - Midterm Quiz**

*Sat., March 1 – Mon., March 10 - Spring Recess*

Week 8 (March 12, 14):                   The Great Ascetic: the Mythology and Cult of Shiva.

***Friday, March 14: Image papers due***

Week 9 (March 19, 21):               Devi, the Great Goddess

Week 10 (March 26, 28):            Buddhism in India. The Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha.

Week 11 (April 2, 4):                Buddhism: Buddhist doctrine, mythology, images, and rituals. Mahayana, the Great Vehicle

Week 12 (April 9, 11):             Jainism. Jina Mahavira. Jain beliefs, rituals, and worldview. History of Sikhism.

Week 13 (April 16):                 Islam, Judaism, and Christianity in India.

[No class on April 18: Easter Recess]

Week 14 (April 23, 25):    April 23 – Final projects presentations  
***April 25 – Final Quiz***

***May 2 – Final Papers are due***

**Required Books:**

Clothey, Fred.  
Religion in India: A Historical Introduction. Routledge, 2006.  
[or an electronic/Kindle edition]

Flood, Gavin D.  
An Introduction to Hinduism. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Thompson, George.  
The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation. North Point Press, 2008.

Dimmitt, Cornelia & van Buitenen, J.A.B.  
Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas. Temple University Press, 1981.

Sister Nivedita & Coomaraswamy, Ananda Kentish.

Myths Of The Hindus & Buddhists. Nabu Press, 2010 (or: Dover Publications, New York, 1967)

Lopez, Donald.  
Buddhist Scriptures. Penguin Classics, 2004.  
[or an electronic/Kindle edition]

Gethin, Rupert. The Foundations of Buddhism. Oxford University Press, 1998.  
[or an electronic/Kindle edition]

**Recommended books:**

Zimmer, Heinrich Robert  
Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization. Princeton University Press, 1946  
(1972, etc.)

Miller, Barbara Stoler (Translator)  
Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gitagovinda. Columbia University Press,  
1985.

Menon, Ramesh.  
The Ramayana: A Modern Retelling of the Great Indian Epic.  
North Point Press, 2004.

All other required readings (i.e., occasional handouts) as well as a reading schedule for a particular week will be made available through Blackboard.

**Additional Notes:**

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact the Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.

Students are advised to review the Academic Honesty Policy (available in the Student Handbook posted on the Moravian College Website) and are required to follow the guidelines therein.

Our syllabus will be posted on Blackboard, and updated periodically with any changes we find we need to make as we progress throughout the semester. You also may find your grades posted on the Blackboard gradebook. Please consult this throughout the semester to view and monitor your progress.