Gods, Sages and Kings: Readings in Indian Mythology (REL 3333)
Department of Religion, University of Florida
Spring 2014
T 2-3, R 3 (Tuesday 8:30 – 10:25 am, Thursday 9:35 – 10:25 am)
AND (Anderson Hall) 13

INSTRUCTOR
Travis L. Smith, Department of Religion (tlsmith@ufl.edu)
Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30am – 1:30pm, Anderson 008, and by appointment
Office Phone: (352) 273-2941 (email preferred)

Course Description

A survey and analysis of some important narrative genres and myth cycles of premodern India, featuring selections from the Vedas, Purāṇas, the Indian epics and Sanskrit courtly poetry, read in translation.

Introduction

This course will examine a broad selection of mythological narratives of traditional India, focusing on figures such as Śiva, Krṣṇa and the Goddess, and on premodern textual traditions such as the Vedas, Purāṇas, epics and lyric poetry, read in translation from Sanskrit and other Indic languages. Through these stories, the course will examine important themes such as karma and rebirth, time and cosmology, sacred place, asceticism, class and caste, and the relationship between the human and divine realms. The readings in the course will also provide an occasion to re-think categories such as “myth,” “history,” and “religion” in framing our analyses of these narrative texts. Though the focus in this course is on premodern Indian literature, it will introduce the students to themes and concepts that can be traced through contemporary Indian thought, and will additionally provide a basis for students outside the field to engage in comparative work with other traditions.

Required Texts

The following books will be available for purchase from local booksellers, and will also be placed on library reserve (Library West) where possible. Other editions (reprints, etc.) of these texts are fine, but please ensure that the translator is the same. You are welcome to consult
other translations of texts such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavad-gita, but you are expected to use the following translations as your primary references.


*SUNY*, 1991. [optional]


**Course Requirements and Grading Policy**

ALL REQUIREMENTS MUST BE FULFILLED FOR A PASSING GRADE in the class. You cannot simply skip one of the assignments and expect to pass.

ANY PAPER HANDED IN LATE WILL BE PENALIZED, up to a half-grade per full day of lateness. Extensions without penalty will only be granted in advance of the due date, and if sufficient, reasonable justification for the extension is provided.

1. **Attendance and Participation (10%)**

It is imperative that you come to class prepared to discuss the readings. This is a discussion-centered course, so attendance and participation are very important parts of your grade; absences will be monitored closely and excessive tardiness will be counted towards absences. Students in attendance are expected to sign in at every class session; attendance will be taken from the sign in sheet in order to eliminate attendance oversights. In case of disputed absences, the sign in sheet will be considered the verification of records. Those who miss more than three classes due to medical illness might consider dropping the course in accordance with the UF illness guidelines. Students should consult the University of Florida attendance
policy for any questions or clarifications at the following URL:
http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationattendance.html. Students are expected to
take notes on the assigned readings and review notes **before** coming to class. Be in class on
time and to stay until class is finished.

2. **In-class Quizzes (15%)**

Periodically, brief quizzes will be administered at the beginning of class to assess students’
assembling of the required readings. These will not be announced beforehand. Expect from 5-10 such quizzes during the course of the semester. In-class quizzes can only be made up if the
absence was due to a documented medical emergency or the absence was otherwise arranged
with the instructor. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

2. **Midterm Exam (15%)**

An in-class midterm exam will be held on **Thursday, February 27**. The exam will test terms and
concepts from the readings and class discussions and will consist of three parts: short answers,
close reading and a critical essay.

3. **Response Papers (40%)**

Four brief response papers of roughly 1000 words (about 3-5 double-spaced pages) each will be
required. The paper topics will be announced in class, and the assignment and writing
guidelines will be posted on Sakai under the Assignments tab. These are not intended to be
research papers, but rather, responses to specific course readings. The response papers will be
due via Sakai on the following **Sundays: February 2, February 23, March 23 and April 13.**

4. **Final Exam (20%)**

An in-class final exam will be held on **Tuesday, April 22**. The exam will consist of four parts:
short answers, identifications, close reading and a critical essay.

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<th>Grade Proportion</th>
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<td>Participation 10%</td>
<td>100-93=A</td>
<td>A=4.0</td>
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<td>Quizzes 15%</td>
<td>92-90=A-</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam 25 %</td>
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Schedule of Readings and Assignments

*Links to the articles, along with complete bibliographic references, are available on the Sakai website, under the “Lessons” tab*

**WEEK ONE: “Mythology” and Indic literary traditions**

**T 1/7**

Introduction to the course

**R 1/9**


**WEEK TWO: Vedas and Brāhmaṇas**

**T 1/14**


Wendy Doniger, trans. *The Rig Veda* (pp. 97-104, 121-126, 128-138, 139-146, 148-156)

“Indra, Tvastr and Vrtra” (from the *Krsna Yajur Veda*) (pp. 188-193)

**R 1/16**

Cyavana (from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*)
Cyavana (from the Mahābhārata)

WEEK THREE: The Mahābhārata and its Context


WEEK FOUR: Mahābhārata II


Response paper #1 due on Sunday 2/2

WEEK FIVE: Mahābhārata III


WEEK SIX: Mahābhārata IV


WEEK SEVEN: The Bhagavad-Gītā


Barbara Stoler Miller, Bhagavad-Gita, chapters 1-6.

Miller, Bhagavad-Gita, chapters 9-11, 18.

Response paper #2 due on Sunday 2/23

WEEK EIGHT: Midterm


In-class Midterm Exam

WEEK NINE: SPRING BREAK

No class, no readings: enjoy the break!

WEEK TEN: Purāṇa


“Śiva and Divodāsa” from the Skandapurāṇa


WEEK ELEVEN:  Kṛṣṇa in the Purāṇas

T 3/18  Edwin Bryant, Krishna: the Beautiful Legend of God (Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa Book X), pp. 7-51, 100-106, 125-143.


Response paper #3 due on Sunday 3/23

WEEK TWELVE: The Devī-Māhātmya


R 3/27  Coburn, Encountering the Goddess, selections.

WEEK THIRTEEN: Rāmāyaṇa I – Vālmīki’s “Original Poem”


WEEK FOURTEEN: Rāmāyaṇa II – Many Rāmāyaṇas


**Response Paper #4 due Sunday, April 13**

**WEEK FIFTEEN: Kālidāsa’s Šākuntala**


**WEEK SIXTEEN: Šākuntala II**

In-class Final Exam