

Introduction to Hindu Culture

REL 2301

Fall 2020

Instructor: Dr. Vasudha Narayanan

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Online Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Location: Online Course, Canvas: <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce and familiarize students with the diverse cultures connected with the Hindu traditions. The focus of this course will be on “lived religion.” We will begin the course by looking at the early religious history in the Indian subcontinent as well as the texts, themes and Hindu philosophies that continue to flourish in the 21st century. Throughout the course of the semester, we will read and discuss literature, art and architecture, dance and music, gender issues, social structures, and ritual traditions.

The course also considers the reach and influence of Hinduism beyond India by examining how the Hindu traditions form a substratum culture in Southeast Asia and functions as a living tradition in the Caribbean and in the United States. The course content raises and answers questions like: Why do Hindus wear a mark on their forehead? What kind of diet do Hindus follow? What happens inside Hindu temples? How do Hindus celebrate festivals? In doing so, we will also touch on the broader issues of colonial scholarship, gender, importance of language, construction of religious identities, and political and social issues.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course the student will be able to:

- Explain key concepts in the Hindu traditions as exemplified through sacred texts (written or oral), ritual practices and popular beliefs.
- Identify the major gods and goddesses within the Hindu traditions
- Provide a historical synopsis of the development of the Hindu traditions in India and beyond

Required Textbook

Narayanan, Vasudha. *A Hundred Autumns to Live*. (manuscript)

Schweig, Graham. *The Beloved Lord's Secret Love Song*. New York: HarperOne, 2007.

Reading materials for this course (with the exception of Schweig) will be made available in electronic format (e.g., .pdf files, .doc files, web links, etc.) on Canvas <https://elearning.ufl.edu>

Grading Breakdown

Quizzes	Discussion Posts	Reflection Paper/Assignment	Final Exam
40%	20%	20%	20%

Evaluation

Grades will be computed based on the percentages given above according to the following 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
E: 59 or below		

For more information about UF's minus grade system visit: <http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>

Quizzes

This course will conduct weekly online quizzes to evaluate the student's grasp and understanding of concepts, facts, arguments, and other important information covered in the lectures and readings presented during that particular week. Before taking a quiz, students should have watched all the videos and completed the required readings for the week. All quizzes will be administered online through the Canvas website. All quizzes will be made available for two days beginning on Thursday. The quizzes will be made available **6:00 am Thursday morning**; the student will have **until 9:00 pm the Friday** of the same week to take the quiz. Unless otherwise stated the quizzes will be ten minutes. You will be notified in advance in case any changes are made concerning the time. Questions will be randomly generated from a pool predetermined questions which ensures that no two students have the same exact quiz. This procedure is necessary in an online class in order to discourage cheating. These quizzes will comprise 40% of your overall grade for the course. For further information on taking quizzes in -Canvas please consult the online help files. **If you have any technical issues with the course assignments (quizzes, discussion posts etc.) please contact the UF helpdesk at 352-392-4357 immediately and get a ticket number. You can call the helpdesk even after it closes at 5:00pm and get a ticket number.**

Online Discussion Postings

Every week students are expected to submit **two** posts to the online course forums in Canvas. **Each of these required posts must be at least 100 words in length.** These forums are only available to the instructors and other students enrolled in the course. **The first post** must be an independent post initiated by the student in the forums. This independent post should be a reflection/response to the course readings and/or lectures required for that week. The student should feel free to compose a post on a topic draw from the course's weekly material that most interests him or her. A few example topics will be made available to students should selecting a topic prove too difficult. **The first independent post is due at 9:00 pm on Wednesday.** In order to facilitate discussion among fellow students **the second required post** must be composed in response to another student's post on the readings/lectures from that week. For credit, the weekly posts must be made by **Thursday 9:00 pm**, unless informed otherwise. Students are encouraged to upload their posts well in advance of this deadline so that other students can engage with your comments and observations for the required response post. All posts should be articulate and well-considered. Posts should also adhere to the rules of English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Although only two posts are required, students are encouraged to make additional (relevant) posts in order to facilitate further discussion with your classmates. Additional posts beyond the two required posts can be of any length. All posts should be courteous, academic and non-aggressive. Rude and demeaning online behavior will not be tolerated for any reason and could adversely affect your grade. While students may certainly be critical, such critical responses and observations should be presented in a professional and academic manner. **These discussion posts will comprise 20% of your overall grade for the course.**

Reflection Papers

This course will require you to write one 6-8 page reflection paper or assignment. For each paper, you will be provided with a general topic by your instructor. Students are expected to write about this topic by drawing upon their course readings, lectures and discussions. The papers should be double-spaced and have 1-inch page margins. The font should be 12pt Times New Roman (or Calibri). The first reflection paper will be **due 11/19/2020 by 9:00pm**.

Final Exam

This final exam for this course will be administered via Canvas. The exam will be cumulative, and the questions will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, true/false, and matching questions. Like quizzes, the final exam will be timed and the date will be announced well in advance. The final exam will comprise 20% of your overall grade for the course. **The Final exam will become available on 12/12/2020 at 12:00 am and will remain available until 9:00 pm on 12/16/2020.**

Attendance

This course is completely online and there are no in-person meetings for lectures or exams. All course activities will be conducted via Canvas (<https://elearning.ufl.edu/>).

Academic Honesty

Guidelines for academic honesty at the University of Florida can be found at:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcode.php>

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the guidelines detailed at the above site and related links and adhere to them.

Online Behavior

Students are expected to be courteous to the instructor and other students in the class. Rude and demeaning online behavior will not be tolerated and could adversely affect a student's grade. All posts, emails and other forms of electronic correspondence should be courteous and professional.

Although the course is online, the University's honor and conduct codes still apply:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/>

Students with Disabilities

Any student with a disability must register with the office of the Dean of Students:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Tentative Course Schedule (subject to modification)

Week 1 (8/31 – 9/4): Course Introduction

Introduction Video & Lecture:

- Course Introduction by Vasudha Narayanan
- Introduction to Hindu Culture – Forehead Marks by Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, "Chapter 1: Forehead Marks" in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.

Week 2 (9/7- 9/11): The Beginnings: Indus Valley, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*

Video Lectures:

- Indus Valley by Vasudha Narayanan

- The Vedas by Vasudha Narayanan
- The Upanishads by Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 3: Lead me from Darkness to Light” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.

Week 3 (9/14 – 9/18): The Classical Traditions: Ramayana in Text and Performance

Video Lectures:

- The Ramayana by Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 5: Epic and Puranic World Views” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*, pages 93-98.

Week 4 (9/21-9/25): The Classical Traditions: Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita

Video Lectures:

- The Mahabharata by Vasudha Narayanan
- The Bhagavad Gita

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 5: Epic and Puranic World Views” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*, pages 98-111.
- Schweig, Graham. *The Beloved Lord’s Secret Love Song*. New York: HarperOne, 2007

Week 5 (9/28 - 10/2) Puranas and the Evolving Nature of Deities

Video Lectures:

- Gods and Goddesses in the Hindu Traditions by Vasudha Narayanan
- The Bhagavata Purana

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 5: Epic and Puranic World Views” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*, pages 111-130.

Week 6 (10/5-10/9): Philosophy in the Hindu Traditions

Video Lectures:

- Hindu Philosophy and Theology by Jonathan Edelmann
- Yoga Philosophy and Practice by Jonathan Edelmann

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 9: Philosophy in the Hindu Traditions” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.

Week 7 (10/12 – 10/16): Bhakti Traditions: Part 1 – The Alvars

Video Lectures:

- Hindu Bhakti Traditions I by Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 8: Weaving Garlands of Love: Devotional Literature in the Hindu Traditions” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.

Week 8 (10/19 – 10/23): Sacred Places and Temples

Video Lectures:

- Sacred Places and Temples by Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 10: Sacred Places and Temples I” and “Chapter 11: Sacred Places and Temples II” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.

Week 9 (10/26 – 10/30) Hinduism in Southeast Asia

Video Lectures:

- Hinduism in Southeast Asia by Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 7: Hindu Narratives and Traditions in South-east Asia: A Narrative and Historical Framework” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.

Week 10 (11/2 – 11/6): Hindu Traditions: 15-18th Centuries

Video Lectures:

- Bhakti Traditions II by Bhakti Mamtara
- Colonialism by Prea Persaud

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 8: Weaving Garlands of Love: Devotional Literature in the Hindu Traditions” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*, pages 256-272.

Week 11 (11/9-11/13): Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness, Purity and Pollution and Women

Video Lectures:

- Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness, Women and Domestic Rituals by Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 14: Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness, Purity and Pollution and Women” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.

Week 12 (11/16-11/20): Hindu Festivals

Video Lectures:

- Hindu Festivals by Vasudha Narayanan

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 16: Feasting and Fasting: Domestic Celebrations and Votive Rituals” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.

Week 13 (11/23 – 11/24) Hinduism and the Environment

Video Lectures:

- Hinduism and the Environment by Whitney Sanford

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, Vasudha. “One Tree is Equal to Ten Sons”: Hindu Responses to the Problems of Ecology, Population and Consumption.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. vol. 65, no. 2, 1997, pp. 291-332.

Week 14 (11/30 – 12/4) Performing Arts in Hinduism

Video Lectures:

- Hinduism in Bollywood by Jodi Shaw

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 19: Narrative, Music and Dance in the Hindu Traditions” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.

- Lutgendorf, Phillip. “Is there an Indian way of Filmmaking?” *International Journal of Hindu Studies*. Vol. 10, no. 3, 2006, pp. 227-256.

Week 15 (12/7 -12/11) Hinduism in the Diaspora

Video Lectures:

- Hinduism in the Diaspora by Vasudha Narayanan
- Hinduism in Trinidad by Priyanka Ramlakhan
- Hinduism in the Caribbean by Prea Persaud

Required Readings:

- Narayanan, “Chapter 12: Creating the Hindu Experience in the United States” and “Chapter 13: Victory to Govinda who Lives in America: Hindu Rituals to Sacralize the American Landscape” in *A Hundred Autumns to Live*.
- Younger, Paul. “Story Three: Trinidad – Ethnic Religion” in *New Homelands: Hindu Communities in Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa, Fiji and East Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Final exams: December 12-16