RELG 230 has been designated as a SpeakWrite course by the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences. As part of the Eberly College’s commitment to fostering effective communication skills, this course will emphasize informal and formal modes of communication, teach discipline-specific communication techniques, use a process-based approach to learning that provides opportunities for feedback and revision, and base 100% of your final grade on successful written performance.

 

RELG 230-001: Religions of India

M/W/F, 2:30 – 3:20 pm, Room: BKH G25

Instructor: Dr. Alex Snow, Joseph.Snow@mail.wvu.edu

Office Hours – M/W/F 11:00 am – Noon, Room 252 Stansbury Hall

“Indian religions ask again and again: ‘How well do you see?’”[[1]](#footnote-1)

“Who is Shiva, dancing wildly in a ring of fire?

What is happening when the priest pours honey and yogurt over the image of Vishnu?

Why does the woman touch the feet of the ascetic beggar?”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Course Description This class introduces several religious traditions that for many centuries have deeply influenced the patterns by which people have been living in the region of the world currently known as South Asia, a region that has its geographical and cultural center in the subcontinent of India. We begin with an extensive introduction and review of the history, texts, and practices encompassing Indian spirituality in general, covering some 3,500 years and including many of the major traditions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism, Baha’i, and others. We will explore a great variety of topics: the life of the Buddha; karma and rebirth; inspiring teachers and gurus; the epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata; holy landscapes, shrines and festivals; enlightenment; and—for all the faiths—the spiritual and ethical teachings, art and architecture, sacred writings, ritual and ceremony, and death and the afterlife. We also examine the rise of new religious movements in India, the spread of religious pluralism, and the movement toward interfaith dialogue at the beginning of the new millennium. Finally, the experience of the divine in India will merge the components of sight, sound, and performance. Thus, the role of the visual image is essential to Indian tradition and culture, though many attempts to understand India’s divine images have still been laden with misperceptions. Darsan, a Sanskrit word that means “seeing,” will be one aid to our vision, helping us to read, think, and look at various Indian images with new appreciation and imagination. Similarly, mantra, “sacred sound,” in the form of prayers, rituals, and chants, will permeate the practice of Indian religion in both temple and home settings – as well as the power to transform consciousness.

Course Learning Objectives Indian religions present challenges to our Euro-American identity. By the end of the class we will articulate the significance of Indian religions within such constructed and mediated identities. Our highly individualistic approaches will be challenged when confronted with these traditions. For example, can we really say that “land” is just a “natural resource”? Or, do Southeast Asian traditions have a more viable way of thinking about and expressing the full range of human and non-human interrelationships when referring to such places? You will also become acquainted with the current social, political, economic, gender, and scientific challenges facing the survival of these traditions, and you will be able to question the adequacy of our understanding of “religion” by looking at and engaging in cross-cultural comparison.[[3]](#footnote-3) In sum, the active learning strategies and participatory objectives of this course include, but are not limited to, the following goals:

1. To analyze and define what we mean by the nature and scope of Indian “religion(s)” and to think critically about these subjects;
2. To compare and contrast the historical contexts of various Indian and Southeast Asian cultures in order to think imaginatively about the nature of religion as a basic response to, and expression of, the human condition;
3. To identify and defend the diversity of perspectives, concepts, and theories used within the study of religion;
4. To illustrate fluency in describing and interpreting contextually diverse manifestations of religion(s), while simultaneously developing skills in critical analysis and oral expression by reading, talking, and writing about India.

Required Texts

1. Religion in India: A Historical Introduction, Fred Clothey, Routledge Press, 2007 (C)
2. India: A Sacred Geography, Diana L. Eck, Three Rivers Press, 2012 (E)
3. India’s Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes, Karline McLain, Indiana University Press, 2009 (M)
4. Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India, William Dalrymple, Vintage Departures, 2011 (D)

Schedule of Readings

August

Wednesday 17th First Day of Classes

Friday 19th (C) Chapter 1 – On Wearing Good Lenses (1-13)

Monday 22nd (C) Chapter 2 – Sources of Indian Religion (14-29)

Wednesday 24th (C) Chapter 3 – The Early Urban Period: the Upanisads (30-48)

Friday 26th (C) Chapter 4 – The Urban Period (51-86)

Monday 29th (C) Chapter 5 – The Post-Classical Period (87-121)

Wednesday 31st (C) Chapter 6 – The Coming of Islam (122-136)

September

Friday 2nd (C) Chapter 7 – Developments in the Late Medieval Period (137-161)

Monday 5th No Class – Labor Day Recess

Wednesday 7th (C) Chapter 8 – Streams from the “West” and their Aftermath (162-192)

Friday 9th (C) Chapter 9 – Religion in Contemporary India (193-223)

Monday 12th (C) Chapter 10 – India’s Global Reach (224-247)

 EXAM #1

Wednesday 14th (E) Chapter 1 – A Sacred Geography, An Imagined Landscape (1-42)

Friday 16th (E) Chapter 1 – A Sacred Geography, An Imagined Landscape (1-42) CONT.

Monday 19th (E) Chapter 2 – “What is India?” (43-106)

Wednesday 21st (E) Chapter 2 – “What is India?” (43-106) CONT.

Friday 23rd (E) Chapter 3 – Rose Apple Island: India in the Lotus of the World (107-130)

Monday 26th (E) Chapter 4 – The Ganga and the Rivers of India (131-188)

Wednesday 28th (E) Chapter 4 – The Ganga and the Rivers of India (131-188) CONT.

Friday 30th (E) Chapter 5 – Shiva’s Light in the Land of India (189-256)

October

Monday 3rd (E) Chapter 5 – Shiva’s Light in the Land of India (189-256) CONT.

 Rosh Hashanah (Day of Special Concern)

Wednesday 5th (E) Chapter 6 – Shakti, the Distribution of the Body of the Goddess (257-300)

 Mid-Semester

Friday 7th (E) Chapter 6 – Shakti, the Distribution of the Body of the Goddess (257-300) CONT.

Monday 10th (E) Chapter 7 – Vishnu, Endless and Descending (301-346)

Wednesday 12th (E) Chapter 7 – Vishnu, Endless and Descending (301-346) CONT.

 Yom Kippur (Day of Special Concern)

Friday 14th (E) Chapter 8 – The Land and Story of Krishna (347-398)

Monday 17th (E) Chapter 8 – The Land and Story of Krishna (347-398) CONT.

Wednesday 19th (E) Chapter 9 – Following Rama: The Ramayana on the Landscape of India (399-440)

Friday 21st (E) Chapter 9 – Following Rama: The Ramayana... (399-440) CONT.

 (E) Chapter 10 – A Pilgrim’s India Today (441-456)

 EXAM #2

Monday 24th (M) Introduction – Comic Books That Radiate a Spiritual Force (1-23)

Wednesday 26th (M) Chapter 1 – The Father of Indian Comic Books (24-52)

Friday 28th (M) Chapter 2 – Long-Suffering Wives and Self-Sacrificing Queens (53-86)

Monday 31st (M) Chapter 3 – Sequencing the Tales of Goddess Durga (87-113)

November

Wednesday 2nd (M) Chapter 4 – The Warrior-King Shivaji in History and Mythology (114-140)

Friday 4th (M) Chapter 5 – Muslims as Secular Heroes and Zealous Villains (141-170)

Monday 7th (M) Chapter 6 – Mahatma Gandhi as a Comic Book Hero (171-197)

 (M) Conclusion – The Global Legacy of Amar Chitra Katha (198-214)

 EXAM #3

Wednesday 9th (D) Chapter 1 – The Nun’s Tale (3-28)

Friday 11th (D) Chapter 2 – The Dancer of Kannur (29-54)

 Veterans Day (Day of Special Concern)

 Birth of Baha’u’llah (Day of Special Concern)

Monday 14th (D) Chapter 3 – The Daughters of Yellamma (55-75)

Wednesday 16th (D) Chapter 4 – The Singer of Epics (76-108)

Friday 18th (D) Chapter 5 – The Red Fairy (109-141)

Monday 21st No Class – Fall Recess

Wednesday 23rd No Class – Fall Recess

Friday 25th No Class – Fall Recess

Monday 28th (D) Chapter 6 – The Monk’s Tale (142-170)

Wednesday 30th (D) Chapter 7 – The Maker of Idols (171-198)

December

Friday 2nd (D) Chapter 8 – The Lady Twilight (199-225)

Monday 5th (D) Chapter 9 – The Song of the Blind Minstrel (226-251)

 Last Day of Class

Thursday 8th EXAM #4 (Final Exam, 11a-1pm)

Course Requirements

Readings: In order to truly grasp the purpose of this course, reading is vitally important. Students are expected to complete required readings prior to the class for which they have been assigned.

Participation: Your participation will serve as the foundation for the majority of classroom interactions. Students are strongly encouraged to take an active role in classroom discussions. This class is designed to illicit opinions, debates, etc, thus your participation is paramount to the success of the course.

Conduct: The classroom is designed to be an environment where everyone feels comfortable. Students are expected to act in a professional manner. Specifically, students are required to treat both myself and your peers with empathy and respect. There exists no context where a student should feel unsafe or fearful within the confines of my classroom. Disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated.

Cell Phones and Electronic Devices: In order to limit classroom disruptions, as well as protect against academic misconduct, the use of cell phones, messaging devices and any other non-authorized electronic devices is prohibited in the classroom.

Notes: You are responsible for taking your own notes. I will not provide copies of my notes, nor will the notes be posted online (unless my lecture includes a great deal of material that cannot be found in the course readings). Please do not ask me to provide you with missed notes – please contact another class member to acquire any missed work.

Course Evaluation



You are encouraged to begin working on the take-home exams as early as possible and you are strongly encouraged to meet with me to discuss a first draft of your papers. Sign-up sheets will be available on my office door for meetings to provide you with feedback and opportunities to improve your work before submitting it to be graded. Please also consider using the Eberly Writing Studio at <http://speakwrite.wvu.edu/writing-studio>

Grading: Final grades will be based on 4 In-Class and/or Take-Home Exams (each worth 25% of the final grade). These will be designed to reflect material discussed in both lectures and reading—so it is to your advantage to familiarize yourself with all the class material. These exams consist of short answer and essay type questions. Since these exams are take-home/open-book type, the nature of the questions will be more analytical. They seek to assess your ability to survey and integrate various concepts rather than just reproduce the information in your books. I will give you specific guidelines whenever I release those exams to you. The criteria below will be used when grading:

1) Clarity: The viewpoints you present in your writing must be clearly conceived and well argued. Your writing style should be straight-forward, easy to read and should be clearly related to the issues you wish to address. Topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph are helpful in establishing the issue and argument for the reader at the outset.

2) Engagement with the material: Responses are to be related to the reading material. They are not “reviews” of what has been stated in the book, but are your critical analyses of the reading—seriously taking-up what you consider to be the ‘key’ issues for the study of religion in the reading. An analysis of the issues discussed in the course become clearer the closer your writing is to the texts used in class.

3) Creativity: The ‘work’ of Religious Studies, and perhaps the Humanities in general, is essentially creative. Interpretation of religious phenomena requires that you come to some meaningful relationship with your object of study. This is one of the defining characteristics of creativity. You have a unique and important contribution to make to our collective understandings. There are no predetermined experts in the area of interpretation, only well refined and well argued positions. Your interpretations will be dealt with as importantly as you regard them yourself.

I will provide feedback to the class as a whole to note strengths to maintain and trouble spots to avoid as you continue to improve your abilities to explain and apply key course concepts. Knowledge is cumulative. Understanding your strengths and challenges will help you do better as you continue to articulate what you know. You are also welcome to meet during office hours or by appointment for additional feedback.

Attendance, Quizzes, and Class Participation: Attendance is mandatory for full comprehension of this course. Lectures and reading will be intimately related to each other but oftentimes quite different. It is therefore in your own best interest to do the reading and attend class, as both will reflect in your performance on the Quizzes and Exams. You will be given regular opportunities to participate in class by asking questions, making comments, and interacting with other students during discussions. Also, attendance could influence your performance in the exams; especially, since there will be information in the lectures that you will not find in your textbooks. Besides the material from textbooks, everything else covered in class including lectures, power point slides, discussions, videos, information written on chalk board, etc., can potentially be on the exams. You are expected to attend the class on time and stay until the end of the class; coming in and going out during the class is rude, disruptive, and distracting to other students as well as me. If there are any exceptional circumstances to be considered please let me know before the class starts. The Student Instruction Committee of the Faculty Senate with the support of the Office of the Provost recommends the following social justice statement:

“Students who will miss an examination or a field trip due to a Day of Special Concern absence should notify their instructors at the beginning of the term. Faculty are instructed to make reasonable accommodation for students who miss scheduled exams or field trips as a result of such observance.”

Make-Up Exam Policy: There will be very few opportunities for make-up examinations. All University sanctioned absences will be allowed but under the following circumstances, it is your responsibility to notify me in person of your absence prior to the actual absence. As for other absences, if you are ill on the day of an examination, it is your responsibility to notify me prior to the absence. If you fail to notify me within the actual class window, then I will assume that you just failed to attend.

Final Grades will be determined as follows: Exam #1 100 points

 Exam #2 100 points

 Exam #3 100 points

 Exam #4 100 points

400 points Total

Course Grading Scale:

A — 360-400 pts.

B — 320-359 pts.

C — 280-319 pts.

D — 240-279 pts.

F — 239 points and below

**Grades for Exams:**

* An **A paper** is an outstanding essay which reflects a perceptive and thoughtful response to the assignment. It is well-organized with excellent development of its ideas and reflects the writer’s command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of American prose.
* A **B paper** is a very good essay that fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. It is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics of writing which do not interfere with reading the essay.
* A **C paper** is a satisfactory essay which fulfills the assignment and is adequately developed. The writing is clear and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength which would distinguish an above-average essay.
* A **D paper** is a below-average essay which fulfills the assignment but exhibits major problems in writing. It may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, poor spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.
* An **F paper** is an essay that relates to the topic but is so poorly presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. It fails to present its basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard American usage. Such an essay may have sentence boundary problems, poor use of idiom, inappropriate diction (words used incorrectly), agreement errors, or verb tense problems. An essay that represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing which are clearly not the student’s own work, will receive a grade of F. Please refer to 5 the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the WVU policy on Academic Dishonesty or see the WVU Student Conduct Code at <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_> student\_conduct/student\_conduct\_code. Attend

Academic Integrity: Dishonesty and/or plagiarism are serious offenses. Clear cases will result in appropriate academic discipline and an unforgivable “F” may be given for the entire course. Please see the following: <http://eberly.wvu.edu/current_students/advising_resources/avoiding_plagiarism>. I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing actions, please see the students conduct code at [University Student Conduct Code, Policy Bulletin 31](http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code), or <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code>. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Contact/E-mail Policy: All emails should include your full name, course number, and section (these can all be in your “signature”); If you are including an assignment or other time-sensitive material, do not assume that I received it until I respond (if something is sent and doesn’t come through on time, you will need to forward the already-sent mail); You must turn in a hard copy of any assignment sent by email, unless I’ve specifically said otherwise; I will usually respond to emails within a few hours during the week, but if you email me at night/on weekends I may not respond until the next morning/weekday; Please follow normal rules of grammar, including spell-checking your emails—in general: remember that your emails contribute to people’s impression of you and of your work!

Inclusivity Statement

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Adverse Weather Commitment Statement

In the event of inclement or threatening weather, everyone should use his or her best judgment regarding travel to and from campus. Safety should be the main concern. If you cannot get to class because of adverse weather conditions, you should contact me as soon as possible. Similarly, if I am unable to reach our class location, I will notify you of any cancellation or change as soon as possible (at least 1 hour before class starts), using MIX/Gmail to prevent you from embarking on any unnecessary travel. If you cannot get to class because of weather conditions, I will make allowances relative to required attendance policies, as well as any scheduled tests, quizzes, or other assessments.

Changes in the Course Syllabus

The instructor has the right to make changes in the syllabus throughout the semester as deemed necessary and appropriate. I will let you know of any such changes.

Student Services

I am always available to discuss students' concerns and progress during individual appointments. As well, WVU has the following services for students needing additional assistance:

WELLWVU Students Center of Health WVU Writing Center

<http://www.wvu.edu/~cocenter/> [http://english.wvu.edu/centers-projects/writing-center](https://email.uoit.ca/owa/redir.aspx?C=KPML8omIY0yhOx6qmtZbqrtrVGrcytBIuES4IgJrWQu7V72BBbWvMAxAr_TADffR-7FqO3uK8Uw.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fenglish.wvu.edu%2fcenters-projects%2fwriting-center)

WVU Student Support Services/TRIO Office of Student Life

<http://sss.wvu.edu>/ <http://www.studentlife.wvu.edu>

Course Description from WVU Undergraduate Catalog: RELG 230 - Religions of India. 3 Hours. Proto-Indian religion, Hinduism, beginnings of Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism; historical and theological foundations; developments of thought; and contemporary expressions and encounters with the modern world.

Please check out the Following Websites:

* WVU Program for Religious Studies – <http://religiousstudies.wvu.edu/>
* WVU Religious Studies Club on Facebook – <http://www.facebook.com/groups/268696159888365/>
* WVU Religious Studies and Study Abroad on Facebook – <http://www.facebook.com/groups/133862393434286/>
1. Clothey, Religion in India, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Diana Eck, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Images in India, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In order to participate with these positions in a more reflective way, we'll attempt to keep two important perspectives in mind: Imaginative sympathy—Please take seriously the worlds of peoples involved, assume that religious thoughts and/or practices carry real meaning for any person or group under consideration; and Critical distance—Try to raise questions that may not be raised by the participants, such as, what effect does this faith/practice have on the participant? On society? What kinds of values does a given text suggest or implicitly depend upon? What are the conceptions of human nature that texts and practices envision? What does a given dimension of any tradition show to be fundamental to human happiness and welfare? [↑](#footnote-ref-3)