Our focus is on the rich diversity of religious experience in modern India's plural, democratic society. We explore intersecting religious worlds of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians and others, considering distinctive cosmologies and shared cultures; bounded identities and converging practices.

This course is designated a "critical reflections" course as well as a "writing intensive." Course requirements and class sessions are organized in a fashion designed to fulfill those missions.

Readings

The following books are required readings and are available for purchase at the University Bookstore. They have also been placed on 2-hour reserve in Bird library:


Additional readings available in PDF format on Blackboard:
Wadley, Susan S. 2014. "Likhiyā Painting Women’s Lives in Rural North India."

Requirements (see p. 5 for additional details)

I. Prepared participation including syllabus-based writing assignments

faithful attendance + contributions, prearranged and spontaneous 15

total of 8 syllabus-based papers
2 (4-page) worth 10 each; 6 (2-page) worth 5 each 50 total 65%

II. Research paper

topic statement (2 pages) plus source list 5
rough and partial draft or detailed outline (about 5 pages) 10
final draft (about 10 pages) 20
oral presentation can raise your paper grade total 35%

Extra credit potential 5 max

Daily schedule (like all else in this world of flux, subject to change)

Note: Each reading assignment should be completed before our class meeting on the designated date. When only one textbook chapter is assigned for an entire week, be sure to begin this chapter before Tuesday class and finish it before Thursday!
Week/Date | Topic/Readings
--- | ---
1 Tu 1/14 | Organizational and introductory session

Th 1/16 | History of religious traditions in India: overview through the 12th century (ancient and classical Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and a visit from St. Thomas)
Read: "Introducing South Asia . . . " in Religious Traditions in Modern South Asia (hereafter RT), 1-10
• hand-out for Reflection #1 •

2 Tu 1/21 | Historical overview continued (Islam enters, Sikhism emerges, the British rule, the Dalit movement turns to Buddhism, Independent India declares itself a secular state)
Read: "Introducing South Asia . . . ," RT, 10-24

Th 1/23 | What is pluralism, here and there? why snapshots? why a kaleidoscope? and other critical reflections
student self-introductions and discussion

Explorations

Note: Our class is lucky to feature several special events this spring in connection with the exhibit “Mithila Painting: The Evolution of an Art Form,” running Jan. 30-March 16, 2014, at the SUArt Galleries http://www.mithilapaintings-eaf.org/traveling_exhibition.html and the conference: “Transformations in South Asian Folk Arts, Aesthetics, and Commodities” to take place at Syracuse Feb 27 - March 1 http://mithila.syr.edu/

• discussion leader self-enrollment groups ready to form on Blackboard •

3 Tu 1/28 | Deity
Read: "Deity," RT, 27-50

Th 1/30 | Deity (continued)

4 Tu 2/4 | Texts and their authority
Read: "Texts and their authority," RT, 51-71

Th 2/6 | Texts (continued)
student led discussion # 1

5 Tu 2/11 | Myth
Guest in the classroom: Dr. Brenda Beck, Department of Anthropology,
University of Toronto & President of the Sophia Hilton Foundation of Canada
explore: http://www.ponnivala.com/story/
Read: "Myth," RT, 72-92
• virtual handout for research projects •

Th 2/13 | Myth (continued)
Read: Wadley (BB pdf)
• initial formation of project groups •
we will visit the Mithila Art exhibit together around 11:40
6  Tu 2/18  Guest in the classroom: lecture demonstration by visiting Mithila artist Rani Jha
Read: Wadley (BB pdf)

7  Tu 2/25  Ritual and worship (continued)  
student led discussion # 2

7  Th 2/27  more on ritual; share and talk about research topics
*** research topic due in class ***

This weekend: Strongly recommended event with extra credit potential: conference on “Transformations in South Asian Folk Arts, Aesthetics, and Commodities”

8  Tu 3/4  Gurus, pirs, and other guides
Read: "Teachers and their traditions," RT, 115-138

8  Th 3/6  Gurus, continued
Watch: Music at the Ashram (15 minutes)

9  SPRING BREAK!

10 Tu 3/18  Hierarchy
Read: "Caste: social relations, cultural formations," RT, 139-156

10 Th 3/20  Hierarchy, continued
Read: "Confluence of caste and religion," RT, 159-171
student led discussion # 3

Tu 3/25, 12:30 pm Strongly recommended event with extra credit potential: South Asia seminar by Afsar Mohammad title and location TBA

11 Tu 3/25  Boundaries
Guest in the classroom: Professor Afsar Mohammad, University of Texas, will join us to discuss his work; students should prepare questions
Read: Mohammad (BB pdf)

11 Th 3/27  Boundaries, continued
Read: "Construction of Religious Boundaries," RT, 190-209

12 Tu 4/1  Spaces
Read: "Public and Private Space," RT, 210-228

12 Th 4/3  Spaces, continued
"Conflicting Paradigms," RT, 229-245
Watch: TBA on Ayodhya (20-30 minutes)
student led discussion # 4
imagining Mumbai

13  Tu 4/8  City-scapes: neighbors, family . . .
Read: *Death of Vishnu*, Ch. 1-4, 13-84
Watch: *Bombay*, Part 1
*** DRAFTS of research projects due ***

Th 4/10  faith . . . romance . . .
Read: *Death of Vishnu*, Ch. 5-7, pp. 85-149. . .
Watch: *Bombay*, Part 2

14  Tu 4/15  death . . .
Read: *Death of Vishnu*, Ch. 8-11, 150-224. . .
• drafts returned with comments •

** Th 4/17  heaven?**
Read: *Death of Vishnu*, Ch. 12-16, 225-295
*student led discussion #5*

*project presentations (final 3 class sessions)*

15  Tu 4/22  student project presentations Day 1 + evaluations

Th 4/24  student project presentations Day 2

16  Tu 4/29  student project presentations Day 3 + Indian snacks
*** due date for final draft of research paper ***

More about student responsibilities and requirements

I. Prepared participation and syllabus-based writings

15% of your grade is assessed on the basis of presence and preparation. This is a lecture / discussion class. Although certain days are designated *discussion* (and you should arrive with your thoughts well in order), the 80-minute time-slot allows ample opportunity for questions and comments every meeting. Please come to class prepared to talk about the week’s readings and related issues; bring your book.

Everyone starts with 12 points (B+). This is maintained through coming to class regularly, and a responsible performance when you take your discussion leader turn. Better than good attendance, more frequent discussion contributions, or other evident efforts can raise this grade; negligence such as a no-show on your discussion leader turn day, or excessive absences, will lower it.

There are five student-led discussion sessions. Part of your participation requirement is to take one turn to join a small group in preparing questions and helping to lead class discussion on the assigned materials on one of these days. Discussion leaders' tasks are not to summarize or present the readings, but rather to open discussion. You are welcome to use creative strategies (role-playing, reading aloud, debate, focus groups, storytelling, or anything you can think of) to do this. Each group requires one volunteer to coordinate tasks (who will receive 1 extra-credit point). Each group member must turn in a sheet with their questions or other notes on preparation; each group will be graded: √ ; √+ or √-

There will be a sign-up process on blackboard starting January 29; please look at the syllabus and decide which day you prefer; remember that you may not get your first choice.
Attendance counts, but we are not unreasonable about this. Beginning Thursday, January 23, your TA, Lauren, will do her best to keep an accurate written record of student attendance. Each class member is allowed a generous 3 "no fault" unexcused absences. For each additional absence participation points will drop by 2. It is your responsibility to sign the sheet!

The only excused absences are documented medical and family emergencies; religious holidays (notify instructor via MySlice; see p. 6 below) and -- for participants in athletic programs -- prearranged documented events. Students missing class for any reason are responsible for finding out what they missed and turning in their work. Contact instructor or TA by email and be sure to check our course Blackboard site for announcements.

In the course of the semester you are required to turn in eight syllabus-based writing assignments, due on boxed dates. Six of these are 2-page reflections and two are 4-page essays. On the four yellow, bold, boxed due dates everyone must turn in the paper; no flexibility. Among the remaining five green, non-bold boxed due dates for 2-page reflections, every student may skip one paper as they wish. If you write all five, we will drop the lowest grade.

Topics for syllabus-based writings: Each textbook chapter (except for the Introduction) ends with a list of "questions for further discussion and research." You should use these as prompts to help you formulate your topics for the 2-page papers. Please avoid those topics that require additional research (but keep anything intriguing in mind for your research paper!). Select a question that you can answer on the basis of the chapter, plus previous chapters, plus lectures, plus your own understandings. For the papers that everyone must write, you will receive virtual hand-outs with specific instructions.

When you are writing a two-page paper you are invited to respond in a more informal style and personal voice. You may include your own opinions and comparative, cross-cultural reflections. Please keep in mind that although these papers need not construct an argument, and may be written in the first person, they must always: 1) display a genuine engagement with required readings; 2) be composed in grammatical English,spell-checked and carefully edited. Sloppy writing and sloppy thinking are extremely closely related, and we seek to avoid both at once.

When you are writing a four-page paper, please use a more formal writing style. Your essay should have a unifying theme or argument and employ specific examples from the readings to explore your themes or to demonstrate the points which support your argument.

Some class time will be devoted, as needed, to writing issues. Unless you specifically request in writing (by email is fine) that I not do so, I will freely draw on any of your papers for examples of both terrifically good writing and particular problems in composition. All names will always be removed!

Important: Late work is bad for you and bad for us. On the other hand, we acknowledge the complexities and balancing acts of college life. We will accept papers one class late, with a late penalty of one-half point on 5-point papers and one full point on 10-point papers. Absolutely no syllabus-based papers will ever be accepted beyond one class late.

II. Research projects

Research projects offer an opportunity for students to select an area to explore from a limited set of topics that are not covered, or only slightly covered, on the syllabus. Detailed guidelines will be provided by 2/11. Papers will be individually written, but students will form into groups focused on related subjects and present their research as groups during the last three class sessions.

Extra credit opportunities: Several recommended outside-the-classroom events are noted on the syllabus; a virtual hand-out available on blackboard by 2/18 will explain how you may acquire 2 points maximum for
attending and writing up an event. Other opportunities may be announced as the semester progresses. Serving as coordinator / organizer for a student-led discussion day brings 1 point. No one can get more than 5 extra-credit points.

Learning Outcomes

In keeping with University-wide concerns to assess learning outcomes in undergraduate courses, the religion department advises all students of the following goals. You will learn:

- to understand better what we mean by "religion" and to think more critically about the subject;
- to become more aware of a diversity of perspectives within the study of religion;
- to know and understand better diverse manifestations of religion within human cultures and societies, and be able to describe and interpret them.

Your grades in this course, based on written and classroom performance, will reflect your achievement of these goals, at the broadest level.

IMPORTANT NOTICES REGARDING FAITH TRADITION OBSERVANCES, DISABILITY, INTEGRITY AND COURTESY: PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

faith tradition observances  SU’s religious observances policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class. If you need to miss any class session of "India's Religious Worlds" during the spring semester due to a faith tradition observance, please make sure to take care of filing your notification(s) immediately. For further information, see http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm

disability  Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see http://disabilityservices.syr.edu

academic integrity  The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. Students in REL/SAS 283 found violating academic integrity in any aspect of their class work will receive the grade F for that assignment. Students have a right to appeal. Please see http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/

academic courtesy  All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy to fellow students and instructors. Please come to class on time to avoid disrupting the class; for the same reason, please do not leave and return while class is in session. Once class begins, you must refrain from personal conversations. You must put away all non-course reading materials (e.g. newspapers). Normal practice is to turn off and put away all electronic devices unless they are specifically required to access course materials; if that is the case, inform instructor. Please avoid premature preparations to leave class; your instructor will let you know when class is over. You may be asked to leave the class for the day if you do not follow these rules.