

**RELI 205**

**THE RELIGIONS OF INDIA: GODS, GODDESSES AND THE SACRED**



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**SCHOOL OF ART HISTORY, CLASSICS & RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON**

**Trimester 2, 2007**

# RELI 205

## THE RELIGIONS OF INDIA: GODS, GODDESSES AND THE SACRED

**Course co-ordinator:** Dr Rick Weiss,  
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**Tutor:** Joe McCarter  
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Hunter 215

**Where and when:** Lectures: HU 220  
Tuesday 4:10 – 6:00pm  
Tutorials: tba

Religious Studies is in the Hunter Building. The programme administrator, Alikali Kalliabetsos, is in room HU 318 (ext 5299). **Notices regarding the course or any information on changes will be posted on the notice board outside her office.**

**Office Hours:** The main office is open Monday - Friday, 9.30 am – 12:00 and 2:30 - 4:30 pm. You can arrange to meet with Dr. Weiss by appointment.

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### *Course outline*

**1 The course:** The course will investigate major themes in the religious traditions originating in India, particularly Hinduism, maintaining a strong emphasis on contemporary India against a detailed backdrop of history. We will engage primary and secondary materials on a variety of subjects: sacrifice, worship, narratives, gender, social hierarchy, and politics, to name a few. The course will introduce students to the complexity and diversity of religious practices, myths, and doctrines of the region, which we will analyse using the scholarly methods of religious studies.

**By the end of this course,** students should be conversant with the basic data of the religions of India and should develop a critical awareness of this data. Students will have the opportunity to interpret primary sources for themselves and will thereby increase their skills in critical thinking and scholarly writing.

**2 Course objectives:** The course objectives are:

- to increase the knowledge of students about Indian religions in their contemporary manifestations and historical contexts.
- to develop students' skills in approaching the subject critically, yet with sensitivity, and applying these skills to the evaluation of primary and scholarly sources.
- to encourage critical analysis of the data of religion covered in the course, that is, worship, sacrifice, ritual, mythology, legitimation of social hierarchy, gender, religious leaders, and the intersection of religion and politics.

- 3 The lecture programme** follows. Lectures may be changed from time to time. As much notice as possible will be given when changes occur and, if necessary a revised programme will be issued at lectures.
- 4 Tutorials are held weekly.** They deal with topics which complement the lecture programme and they provide an opportunity to discuss aspects of the course in a small group and develop the ability to contribute to discussions.
- 5 The course is internally assessed** by means of 2 essays, a class test and tutorial assignments as follows:
- **Essay 1**, approximately **1,500** words, is to be submitted by **Friday, August 3, 2007, 5pm**, and is worth **25%** of the final grade. Essays are to be submitted in the essay box outside of Alikı's office, Hunter 318.
  - **Essay 2**, approximately **2,500** words, is to be submitted by **Friday, September 28, 2007, 5pm**, and is worth **35%** of the final grade.
  - **8 tutorial assignments** are to be handed in at tutorials. These are worth **10%** of the final grade. They are to be short thoughtful responses to questions set for the required reading of the week and should be no more than one page each. At the end of each response, include two questions that you had on the reading or lecture. These questions can also serve as points of discussion in the tutorials.
  - **An in-class test**, held on **October 9, 2007** during class time, is worth **30%** of the final grade.
- 6 The assessment of this course relates to these objectives in the following ways:**
- The tutorial assignments** are designed to facilitate student reflection on the required readings, and to allow students to develop skills in critical reading and analysis necessary for essay writing and continued study.
- The essays** will encourage students to pursue their own interests in Indian religions through formulating their own research question(s) in an exploration of primary sources and secondary sources. By focussing on primary sources, students will be exposed first-hand to the issues raised in scholarly analysis and will develop the knowledge and the skills necessary to critically evaluate scholarly studies of materials they have studied for themselves.
- The differing percentage value for the essays is designed to allow students the opportunity to improve their skills without negative repercussions for their final grade.
- The class test** allows students to demonstrate their grasp of the material covered in the course and their understanding of the themes addressed, and creates an opportunity to review and reflect on what they have learned in the course as a whole.
- Mandatory course requirements: the submission of two essays, 8 tutorial assignments and sitting the class test. Attendance at 80% of tutorials.**
- 7 Required Text:** All of the readings are contained in the Course Reader to be purchased from the Student Notes Shop at a cost of approx \$40.00.

**8 Work-load (Recommendation of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences)**

For 200-level 22 points one trimester courses, the working party on workloads and assessments recommends 15 hours per week. An average student should spend 12 hours per week for preparation, reading and writing in addition to attendance at lectures and tutorials.

[200 – level            1 trimester            22 points            15 hours]

**9 General University policies and statutes**

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the Victoria University Calendar available in hard copy or under 'About Victoria' on the VUW home page at [www.vuw.ac.nz](http://www.vuw.ac.nz).

**10 Student and staff conduct**

The Statute on Student Conduct together with the Policy on Staff Conduct ensure that members of the University community are able to work, learn, study and participate in the academic and social aspects of the University's life in an atmosphere of safety and respect. The Statute on Student Conduct contains information on what conduct is prohibited and what steps are to be taken if there is a complaint. For information about complaint procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct, contact the Facilitator and Disputes Advisor or refer to the statute on the VUW policy website at: [www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct)

The Policy on Staff Conduct can be found on the VUW website at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/staffconduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/staffconduct)

**11 Academic grievances**

If you have any academic problems with your course you should talk to the tutor or lecturer concerned; class representatives may be able to help you in this. If you are not satisfied with the result of that meeting, see the Head of School or the relevant Associate Dean; VUWSA Education Coordinators are available to assist in this process. If, after trying the above channels, you are still unsatisfied, formal grievance procedures can be invoked. These are set out in the Academic Grievance Policy which is published on the VUW website at: [www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/academicgrievances](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/academicgrievances)

**12 Students with Impairments (see Appendix 3 of the Assessment Handbook)**

The University has a policy of reasonable accommodation of the needs of students with disabilities. The policy aims to give students with disabilities the same opportunity as other students to demonstrate their abilities. If you have a disability, impairment or chronic medical condition (temporary, permanent or recurring) that may impact on your ability to participate, learn and/or achieve in lectures and tutorials or in meeting the course requirements, please contact the course coordinator as early in the course as possible. Alternatively, you may wish to approach a Student Adviser from Disability Support Services (DSS) to discuss your individual needs and the available options and support on a confidential basis. DSS are located on Level 1, Robert Stout Building; telephone: 463-6070, [disability@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:disability@vuw.ac.nz)

The name of your School's Disability Liaison Person is in the relevant prospectus or can be obtained from the School Office or DSS.

### 13 **Student Support**

Staff at Victoria want students to have positive learning experiences at the University. Each faculty has a designated staff member who can either help you directly if your academic progress is causing you concern, or quickly put you in contact with someone who can. In the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences the support contacts are **Dr Allison Kirkman, Murphy Building, room 407** and **Dr Stuart Brock, Murphy Building, room 312**. Assistance for specific groups is also available from the Kaiwawao Māori, Manaaki Pihipihinga or Victoria International.

#### ***Manaaki Pihipihinga Programme***

This programme offers:

- Academic mentoring for all Māori & Pacific students at all levels of undergraduate study for the faculties of Commerce & Administration and Humanities & Social Sciences. Contact [Manaaki-Pihipihinga-Programme@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Manaaki-Pihipihinga-Programme@vuw.ac.nz) or phone 463 6015 to register for Humanities & Social Science mentoring and 463 8977 to register for mentoring for Commerce and Administration courses
- Postgraduate support network for the above faculties, which links students into all of the post grad activities and workshops on campus and networking opportunities
- Pacific Support Coordinator who can assist Pacific students with transitional issues, disseminate useful information and provide any assistance needed to help students achieve. Contact; [Pacific-Support-Coord@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Pacific-Support-Coord@vuw.ac.nz) or phone 463 5842.

Manaaki Pihipihinga is located at: 14 Kelburn Parade, back court yard, Room 109 D (for Humanities mentoring & some first year Commerce mentoring) or Room 210 level 2 west wing railway station Pipitea (commerce mentoring space). Māori Studies mentoring is done at the marae.

#### ***Student Services***

In addition, the Student Services Group (email: [student-services@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:student-services@vuw.ac.nz)) is available to provide a variety of support and services. Find out more at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/st\\_services/](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/)

VUWSA employs Education Coordinators who deal with academic problems and provide support, advice and advocacy services, as well as organising class representatives and faculty delegates. The Education Office (tel. 463-6983 or 463-6984, email at [education@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:education@vuwsa.org.nz)) is located on the ground floor, Student Union Building.

**14 **Taping of Lectures:**** All students in the School of Art History, Classics and Religious Studies are welcome to use audio-tapes to record lectures. If you want to do this, please see your lecturer, tutor or the relevant programme administrator and complete a disclaimer form which advises of copy right and other relevant issues.

**15 **Class representatives:**** Class representatives are elected in the first week or two of the term. They are supported by the VUW Students' Association, and have a variety of roles, including assistance with grievances and student feedback to staff and VUWSA. Contact details for your class rep will be listed on the Religious Studies notice board.

- 16 Aegrotat regulations** apply to internally assessed courses. Students who are ill, or who have difficult personal circumstances may be having problems completing assessment. The aegrotat provisions to assessment which falls within the last three weeks of teaching or the final examination period, including preparation time for final tests and examinations.

Aegrotat provisions are detailed in section 4.5 of the Assessment Statute (*2007 Calendar*, p. 96) and also on p. 23 of the *2006 Assessment Handbook*. Students can refer to the University's website for further information: <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/timetables/aegrotat.aspx>.

Application forms and information pamphlets should be obtained from the Faculty Student and Academic Services Office (MY 411) or the Manager, Student & Academic Services (MY 410).

- 17 Student Learning Support Services:** A range of workshops, drop-ins and other assistance is provided by SLSS, covering such things as study techniques, essay writing, exam preparation and note taking skills. They are at 14 Kelburn Parade, tel: 463 5999
- 18 Supplementary Materials:** A website of materials related to RELI 205 is being maintained in Blackboard. You can find it by visiting <http://blackboard@vuw.ac.nz>. Your user name is the one issued to you by Student Computing Services. Your password is your Student ID Number. If in doubt, please contact the Student Computing Services Help Desk, 463-6666 (extension 6666 from VUW phones) or by email [scs-help@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:scs-help@vuw.ac.nz)
- 19 Evaluation:** This course will be evaluated by UTDC.

## *Lecture Programme*

### **Lecture Schedule, Required Readings, and Tutorial Questions**

The required readings are essential background for the lecture/seminars and must be done **before each lecture**. The readings will be further discussed in the tutorials. The readings are all found in the Course Reader. Those marked **REQ** are required readings and must be done for each lecture and for participation in tutorials. Those marked **SUP** are supplementary readings and are provided so that each area may be expanded upon.

<b>10 July</b>	<b>Introduction to Indian Religions</b>
<b>17 July</b>	<b>Ritual Fire and the Sacrifice of Others</b>
<b>24 July</b>	<b>Transformations of Sacrifice: Puja, Non-violence, and Jainism</b>
<b>31 July</b>	<b>Worship: Deities and Devotion</b>
<b>7 August</b>	<b>Worship: Temples and Festivals</b>
<b>14 August</b>	<b>Caste, Class and Society</b>

**Mid trimester break (20 August – 2 September 2007)**

<b>4 September</b>	<b>Gurus: Gods on Earth</b>
<b>11 September</b>	<b>Storytelling: Whose Ramayana?</b>
<b>18 September</b>	<b>Models of Kingship (Visit to Kilbirnie Hindu Temple)</b>
<b>25 September</b>	<b>Women and Hinduism: Goddesses or Servants?</b>
<b>2 October</b>	<b>Politics: Identity and the Nation</b>
<b>9 October</b>	<b>Class Test</b>

## ***Tutorial Programme***

The tutorials will cover the readings and lecture for the present week.

### **Week beginning**

- 9 July**            **First week – no tutorial**
- 16 July**            How is sacrifice related to social hierarchy?
- 23 July**            Why do Hindus engage in public rituals of worship? Why do Jains reject sacrifice?
- 30 July**            How do Hindus represent their gods?
- 6 August**            How does the Hindu temple reflect South Asian society? How do festivals reflect society?
- 13 August**            Who enforces caste distinctions? On what basis are these distinctions upheld?

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### **Mid trimester break (20<sup>th</sup> August – 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2007)**

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- 3 September**      What is the difference between a guru and a god? What social role do gurus play?
- 10 September**    What does the Ramayana teach Hindus?
- 17 September**    **Visit to Hindu Temple – no tutorial**
- 24 September**    In what ways can women assert power in Hinduism?
- 1 October**            How has religion contributed to violence in India?
- 8 October**            **Test – no tutorial**



## *Essays*

The essays should be a thoughtful and well-researched treatment of a specific topic. Students are encouraged to come up with their own essay topics, but it is essential that you first discuss your plans with the lecturer.

**1 Essays and assignments** must be placed in the locked assignment box located near the programme administrator's office (HU 318), and students must date and sign the essay register when submitting an essay. **No responsibility will be taken for assignments for which there is no record.** Students should keep a copy of all their work until it is returned.

**2 Due dates:**

The first essay to be submitted by **Friday, August 3, 2007, 5pm.**

The second essay to be submitted by **Friday, September 28, 2007, 5pm.**

**3 Penalties for late essays / assignments:**

- 1 percent point per 24 hours will be deducted for late essays, up to 2 weeks from due date.
- to avoid these deductions, an extension may be sought with an explanation in writing. The reason for the extension does not need to be medical; in the event that it is, a medical certificate must be submitted.
- requests for extensions may be made to the tutor or the course co-ordinator.
- if an essay is handed in 2 weeks after the due date and an extension has not been sought the matter will be referred to the course co-ordinator who will make the final decision as to whether the essay shall be accepted for assessment or not.

**4 Academic integrity and plagiarism**

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means *no cheating*. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. The University defines plagiarism as follows:

*The presentation of the work of another person or other persons as if it were one's own, whether intended or not. This includes published or unpublished work, material on the Internet and the work of other students or staff.*

It is still plagiarism even if you re-structure the material or present it in your own style or words.

*Note: It is however, perfectly acceptable to include the work of others as long as that is acknowledged by appropriate referencing.*

Plagiarism is prohibited at Victoria and is not worth the risk. Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct and may be penalized severely.

Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- an oral or written warning,
- cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course,
- suspension from the course or the University.

Find out more about plagiarism, and how to avoid it, on the University's website: [www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html)

## **Essay one**

This essay is worth **25%** of your final mark. Possible essay topics are provided below. Other topics may be chosen, but must have approval prior to submission. Essays will consist of a thoughtful investigation of a question or problem and must employ primary sources (scriptures, iconography, field trips, interviews with religious specialists in a given tradition, popular literature, observation of a ritual, etc.). You must consult and discuss secondary sources (scholarly views on the topic or the text/ritual/icon, etc.), but the emphasis should be on your own analysis and interpretation of your source. You are to be the scholar for the essays!

### **Ideas for Primary Sources**

In the course reader are excerpts from the texts of the major religious traditions we will discuss this term. Any of these texts in whole or in part may comprise the source for your essay, or you may follow their leads to the source from which they have been extracted.

The following recommended sources are available in the Library, though you will find other sources listed there as well.

**Collected Works** with summaries or excerpts from Indian texts include:

Theodore De Bary, *Sources of Indian Tradition*

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*

Wendy Doniger, ed., *Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism*

Barbara Stoler Miller, ed., *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective*

John S. Hawley and M. Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints*

Brenda Beck, et al, *Folktales of India*

Zaehner, *Hindu Scriptures*

Dimmitt, *Classical Hindu Mythology*

### **Hinduism:**

Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*

Doniger, *The Rig Veda*

Doniger, *The Laws of Manu*

Debroy, *The Holy Vedas*

Debroy, *The Puranas*

Goldman, *The Ramayana*

Miller, *The Bhagavad-Gita*

Miller, *Love Song of the Dark Lord*

Miller, *The Yoga Sutras*

Muller, *Vedic Hymns*

Narayan, *The Mahabharata*

Olivelle, *Upanisads*

Olivelle, *Dharmasutras*

Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*

Olivelle, *Samnyasa Upanishads*

Peterson, *Hymns from the Rg Veda*

Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads*

Ramanujan, A. K. *Speaking of Shiva*

Urban, *Songs of Ecstasy*

The library has a large collection of Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas. A search of the library catalogue will turn up lots of texts. Be sure to use primary texts, not secondary scholarship on these texts.

**Buddhism:**

Carter, *The Dhammapada*

Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*

Nanamoli, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*

Thero, *Treasury of Truth*

Walshe, *Long Discourses of the Buddha*

**Jainism:**

Bhadrabahu, *Kalpa Sutra and Nava Tatva*

Jacobi, *Jaina Agama (or Jaina Sutras)*

**Sikhism:**

McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*

Kabir, *Songs of Kabir from the Adi Granth*

Singh, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*

Singh, *Selections from the sacred writings of the Sikhs*

**Ideas for Guiding Questions**

The following ideas are suggestions for questions you may address in your analysis of the primary source you have chosen for your essay. The essay should focus on a question and should present the results of the investigation of the question in the source. Feel free to devise your own questions from the material, but they must be relevant to the course. You should consult with the lecturer about an individually chosen question.

- 1) What is sacrifice in this source? Is it considered beneficial or detrimental to spiritual development? Why or why not?
- 2) Does the source advocate worship? If so, to what, in what way, and why? How does worship work (i.e., does it appease the deity, does it focus the mind, is it a way of bartering for favours)? What are the benefits and drawbacks of worship?
- 3) How do stories or myths work in a religious tradition? Who is speaking in the story, what is he/she/they saying, whom are they addressing, for purpose? What does the story and/or its context tell us about the tradition from which it comes? Can the same story be used in different traditions to mean different things?
- 4) What does the source indicate about the nature of the person in its religious tradition? What does it mean to be human? What purpose is there to incarnation as a human being? What is the relationship between human beings and the rest of the cosmos?
- 5) In *The Camphor Flame*, Fuller insists that the principle of hierarchy is pervasive in Indian religions, even when people say they are egalitarian (e.g., see the discussion pp. 162-163). Does your source support his thesis or does it undermine it?
- 6) In *The Camphor Flame*, Fuller discusses the importance of the idea that worshipper and deity merge to become one in worship and in sacrifice. Does your source convey this idea or does it counter it?

## **Essay 2**

The second essay is worth **35%** of your final mark. This essay ideally builds on the work you have done for the first essay. You might explore how the religious practices, doctrines, texts, temples, pilgrimage sites, etc. studied in the first half of the term play a role in shaping contemporary issues in India. Alternatively, you can compare a primary source that you examined for the first essay with another primary source. You are strongly encouraged to develop your research on the primary source of the first essay to explore how scholars, political leaders, religious thinkers, etc. interpret the texts you have studied for yourself. You may also devise an essay topic more appealing to your interests. The possibilities for essay topics are vast; you can address anything that touches on religion in India. Self-chosen topics **must be cleared** with the lecturer or tutor.

### **Ideas for Guiding Questions**

- 1) What are the causes for violence in India between religious communities?
- 2) In what way were colonial representations of India gendered? What impact has this had on contemporary visions of Indian identity?
- 3) In what ways does religion serve to empower women in India? How does it disempower them?
- 4) How has the concept of “*ramraj*” (the rule of Rama) in the *Ramayana* been used to justify communal violence?
- 5) Why do the Sikhs want a separate homeland?
- 6) Why do gurus make effective politicians?
- 7) What does Ambedkar’s Buddhism have to offer contemporary Indians of the lowest castes?
- 8) Choose a politician and explore his/her use of religious texts, icons, pilgrimage sites, etc., to legitimise their political platform. For this, you might consider exploring Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Indira Gandhi, or contemporary figures.
- 9) Choose a guru and explore his/her writings, message, and social role.
- 10) How do Hindu temples embody social distinctions along gender and caste lines? How are temples sites in which these distinctions are ignored?
- 11) Why do Hindus go on pilgrimage?

**For guidance in essay writing** and presentation of bibliographies, please refer to the Religious Studies guidelines for essays, attached.