Religions of India

This course offers a comprehensive study of the various religious traditions of India from ancient times to the present. It explores not only the basic theological content of these religious beliefs but also how the context of residing in the complex theological world of India transforms these many religious traditions both from within and without. Exploring religion through myth, ritual, philosophy, literature, poetry, art, and performance this course presents a rich cultural tapestry. But it also traces in detail the historical, social and political factors that have shaped and reshaped the vast cultural landscape of religion in India.

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Departmental Course Description:
An introduction to the diversity of Indian religions, relating religious practices & ideas to broader cultural developments, including visual arts and literature. Focuses on the way Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh traditions address the concept of karma in distinctive
ways, paying special attention to the way words and intentions are said to influence the consequences of a person’s deeds. 3 units.

Learning Objectives:
Students will gain a comprehensive knowledge of the essential doctrines and beliefs of the major religions of India, as well as the important history, myth, ritual, spiritual practice, literature, art, and sacred geography associated with each of these traditions. Students will gain a keen understanding of the cultural diversity of India, and the complex social and political forces that have effected religious change across time in addition to the social forces influencing these faiths today.

Required Texts:
- Reader (available at University Copy & Print, 446 Howe Ave., (916) 929-6147).
- Netflix subscription for home viewing.

Assignments & Grading:
Grades are determined by 4 exams and one short research paper. Three of the exams will be in class and the fourth during finals. NOTE: If you do not attend class you will miss crucial information that will be on the exams. The research paper will be 5 pages in length, double spaced, in a 12 point font, and should have proper MLA or Chicago style citations. Each paper must have an original argument or thesis statement. Each student must choose a topic themselves that reflects a specific aspect of one of the religious traditions studied in this class that is of personal interest to them. At least two academic sources (not included among course readings) must be cited.

Grade Breakdown:
- Exam 1: 20%
- Exam 2: 20%
- Exam 3: 20%
- Exam 4: 20%
- Research Paper: 20%

Week One: No class (Instruction begins Tuesday, 9/2/14)

Week Two: Introduction (9/8/14)

Week Three: Hinduism- Indus Valley, Vedas & Upanisads (9/15/14)
Reading: “Hindu Dharma” pp. 15-84.

Week Four: Hinduism- Epics (9/22/14)
In class film: Rāmāyaṇa (select scenes).
Exam 1

Week Five: Hinduism- Theistic Hinduism: Sects, Gods & Bhakti (9/29/14)
In class film: Vaastu Marapu: A Shilpi Speaks.
In class film: The Wedding of the Goddess (Part 1).

Week Six: Hinduism- Folk Religion & Modern Context (10/6/14)
In class film: Bearing the Heat.

Week Seven: Jainism (10/13/14)
In class film: Ahimsa (Non-violence); a PBS documentary by Michael Tobias.

Week Eight: Midterm & Buddhism- Buddha & Early History (10/20/14)
Reading: “Buddha Dhamma” pp. 102-128.
Watch at Home: The Buddha – PBS Documentary (Narrated by Richard Gere), 1:54.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lIfXlfsbYOw
Exam 2

Week Nine: Buddhism- Meditation & Philosophical Basis (10/27/14)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llfXlfsbYOw

Week Ten: Buddhism- Mahayana & Vajrayana (11/3/14)
Watch at home: Little Buddha (Netflix).
In class film: TBA.

Week Eleven: Sikhism - Early History & Ideas (11/10/14)
Reading: “Sikh Dharam” PP. 130-148.
In class film: Revealed: The Golden Temple.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oeo4BDViHcM

Week Twelve: Sikhism - Texts & Contexts (11/17/14)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odUXxeP3EHI

Exam 3

Week Thirteen: Islam, Sufism & The Baha’i (11/24/14)
Reading: “Indian Muslim Tradition” pp. 201-245.
Watch at home: Prophet Muhammad (2:51). Please watch up to 1:45.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FvfFSIQZnI

Week Fourteen: Zoroastrianism & Judaism (12/1/14)
Reading: “Indian Zoroastrian Tradition” pp. 150-166.
In class film: TBA.

Week Fifteen: Christianity & Conclusions (12/8/14)
Reading: “Contested Categories” pp. 263-286.
In class film: Father Bede Griffiths: Discovering the Feminine (1993).

Finals Week: Exam 4 & Research Paper Due (12/15/14)

Note: Weeks 13-15 present subject areas that are optional. If enough students express special interest in other specific topics relevant to the subject of religion in India, the lectures and readings of these three weeks may be subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.