

ADVANCED STUDIES IN ASIAN RELIGIONS: THE INVENTION OF RELIGION

REL 373

<http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel341.html>

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Fall 2008
T/Th 11:00-12:15 Manly 210
Office Hours: Tuesday 2:00-3:00
or by appointment

DESCRIPTION

This course examines the wider theoretical and political issues involved when scholars of religion represent the socio-semantic systems of those who are often termed “the Other.” After becoming familiar with some of the recent scholarship on the category “religion,” and the issues involved in using it to name what is assumed to be a universally shared human trait, the course then examines some recent controversies, reading samples of the scholarly works in question and the critical responses from scholars and members of the south Asian diaspora community.

Not interested in deciding which side in such debates is correct, the course instead uses these episodes as examples of how discourses on the past, meaning, and identity are unavoidably political.

OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce students to the methods and theories of the academic study of religion.
2. To introduce students to some of the history, theoretical issues, and definitional complexity involved in the study of human narratives, practices, and institutions.
3. To develop reading skills and critical thinking skills as well as verbal and written techniques of argumentation.
4. To introduce students to theoretical analysis and critique of globalization.
5. To develop critical skills for analyzing the contemporary political implications of scholarship.

REQUIRED BOOKS

The four books you will have to purchase (available at the UA Supply Store) are:

James Laine, *Shivaji: Hindu King of Islamic India*
J. E. Llewellyn, *Defining Hinduism: A Reader*
Krishnan Ramaswamy, Antonio de Nicolas, and Aditi Banerjee (eds.), *Invading the Sacred*

REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance and informed participation are expected of all students. Adequate participation in class discussions necessitates that all required readings be done prior to our meeting times; simply put, participation means preparation. Although attendance will not be taken formally, active participation in all class discussions will count toward **20%** of the final grade.
2. Each student must be prepared, on each day that involves a class reading, to offer an oral summary of any of that day’s articles, describing its thesis, data, method, and conclusion(s). Students will be called upon randomly throughout the semester to offer such a summary (only one on any given day), which must be between 5 and 10 minutes in length. Four such summaries will be presented by the end of the semester and each is worth **10%** of the final grade, for a total of **40%**.
3. On Tuesday, Oct 21, students must provide evidence, in class, of having found two media reports that provide background on the controversy surrounding James Laine’s book *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*. These media

reports must allow the students to be conversant with the controversy and its current state and must demonstrate their ability to use Gorgas Library's resources to acquire such articles. Students will orally summarize their two articles and report on what Gorgas resources they used to acquire the reports. This assignment is worth **10%** of the final grade.

4. On Tuesday, December 2, each student must orally present a summary of one critical response found in one of the chapters in section IV of *Invading the Sacred* in relation to the student's own reading of the original media article to which the *Invading the Sacred* author is responding. (Students must use Gorgas Library to obtain a copy of the original media report to which the *Invading the Sacred* author responds.) The student will then have until Monday, December 8, to revise their comments, write them in essay form, and submit them to the professor (by no later than 4 p.m.). This assignment is the opportunity for each student to apply tools acquired to this point in the course and to revise their comments in light of peer feedback. These written assignments are to be no longer than 1,500 words and must identify the significant points where the student does or does not think that the respondent has accurately described the original author's argument. Therefore, both the original article and the response are the student's data for this assignment. This assignment is worth **30%** of the final grade.

GRADING SCALE

This course is worth a total of 100 points (or 100%): 95 and above = A+; 90 and above = A; 85 and above = B+; 80 and above = B; 75 and above = C+; 70 and above = C; 60 and above = D; 59 and below = F.

PLEASE NOTE: (i) No grades of 'Incomplete' will be given in this course. Unless suitable arrangements are made ahead of time with the instructor, students who fail to submit the written assignments on time and those who fail to make their presentations will receive the grade of 'zero' for their missed work. Also, (ii) plagiarism is a serious scholarly offense and any students suspected of plagiarizing will have their work submitted to the Dean of Arts & Sciences who assesses the infraction and hands out the penalty. To avoid the impression of plagiarism, please ensure that you properly cite **all** quoted and paraphrased material. Finally, (iii) students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact the professor as soon as possible to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodations which can be made to meet their needs. Prior to contacting the professor, ensure that you contact the Office of Disability Services.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Th Aug 21	Introduction to the Class Paul Courtright, "Studying Religion in an Age of Terror"
T Aug 26	Representing Hinduism I Hinduism in the World Religions Textbook: Come to class having read the chapter on Hinduism from a standard world religions textbook; be prepared to comment on its representation of Hinduism
Th Aug 28	Representing Hinduism I Sankrant Sanu, "Is There Prejudice in Hinduism Studies? A Look at <i>Encarta</i> " <i>Invading the Sacred</i> , Chapter 16
T Sept 2	Representing Hinduism I <i>Invading the Sacred</i> : Foreword, Preface, and Chapter 1 "Why this Book is Important"
Th Sept 4	Representing Hinduism I <i>Invading the Sacred</i> : Chapter 2 "Religious Studies: Projecting One's Shadow on the 'Other'"
T Sept 9	Theoretical Topics I: The Orient "Edward Said: On Orientalism" (film; 45 min)
Th Sept 11	Theoretical Topics I: The Orient Richard King, "Orientalism and Indian Religions"

- T Sept 16 **Library Tour/Tutorial** (Librarian Jennifer McClure; meet in Osborn Instruction Room, Gorgas Library [near the information desk on the ground floor, when entering Gorgas from the Manly Hall side])
- Th Sept 18 **Theoretical Topics II: The Past**
Hayden White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation” and Bruce Lincoln, “The Political Uses of the Past in the Present”
- T Sept 23 **Theoretical Topics III: The Authentic**
Russell McCutcheon, “The Jargon of Authenticity and the Study of Religion”
- Th Sept 25 **Theoretical Topics IV: The Category Religion - as Universal**
Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”
- T Sept 30 **Theoretical Topics IV: The Category Religion - as Local**
Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category”
- Th Oct 2 **Theoretical Topics IV: The Category Religion - as Political**
Russell McCutcheon, “Religion and the Governable Self”
- T Oct 7 **Theoretical Topics IV: The Category Religion - as Binary**
Russell McCutcheon, “‘They Licked the Platter Clean’: On the Co-Dependency of the Religious and the Secular”
- Th Oct 9 **Mid-Semester Study Break (No Class)**
Read James Laine’s *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India* by T Oct 21
- T Oct 14 -
Th Oct 16 **Case Study I: Assignment (No Class On Either Day)**
Working independently in Gorgas, find and read at least two media reports on the background/outcome/current state of the controversy
- T Oct 21 **Case Study I**
Summary of findings from the media and discussion of the controversy around James Laine’s *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*; also read: Christian Lee Novetzke, “The Laine Controversy and the Study of Hinduism”
- Th Oct 23 **Representing Hinduism II**
Jack Llewellyn, *Defining Hinduism: A Reader* (Chapters 1, 2)
- T Oct 28 **Representing Hinduism II**
Jack Llewellyn, *Defining Hinduism: A Reader* (Chapters 3, 4)
- Th Oct 30 **No Class**
- T Nov 4 **Representing Hinduism II**
Jack Llewellyn, *Defining Hinduism: A Reader* (Chapters 5, 6)
- Th Nov 6 **Representing Hinduism II**
Jack Llewellyn, *Defining Hinduism: A Reader* (Chapters 7, 8)
- T Nov 11 **Representing Hinduism II**
Jack Llewellyn, *Defining Hinduism: A Reader* (Chapters 9)
- Th Nov 13 **Case Study II**

Jeffrey Kripal, "From the Heart"

- T Nov 18 **Case Study II**
Rajiv Malhotra "Wendy's Child Syndrome"
- Th Nov 20 **No Class**
- T Nov 25 **Case Study II**
Jeffrey Kripal , "The Tantric Truth of the Matter: A Fortright Response to Rajiv Malhotra"
- Th Nov 27 **Case Study II**
S. N. Balagangadhara, "India and Her Traditions: A Reply to Jeffrey Kripal" *Invading the Sacred*, Appendix 2
- T Dec 2 **Comparisons**
Invading the Sacred, Chapter 25 and Shanker Vedantam, "Wrath Over a Hindu God: U.S. Scholars Writings Draw Threats from Faithful"
Invading the Sacred, Chapter 26 and Martin Marty, "Scholars of Hinduism Hunder Attack"
Invading the Sacred, Chapter 27 and Edward Rothstein, "Connections: The Scholar Who Irked Hindu Partisans"
Invading the Sacred, Chapter 28 and Amy Braverman, "The Interpretation of Gods"
Invading the Sacred, Chapter 29 and Ramesh Rao, "Hindu God Must Indeed Be Heathen" and Tanmaya Kumar Nanda, "Interview with Prof. Paul Courtright"
- Th Dec 4 **The Last Word...**
Russell McCutcheon, "A Gift With Diminished Returns"