

RELIGION AND IDENTITY IN SOUTH ASIA

REL 483
SPRING 2008

<http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel483ramey2008.htm>

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TR 2:00 - 3:15, 210 Manly Hall
Office Hours: T 11:15-12:15
R 12:30-1:30
and by appointment

This course will analyze critically the various ways people identify themselves and separate groups from each other. While these divisions involve many elements, such as nationality, ethnic/linguistic identity, gender, and occupation, aspects of human experience commonly identified as religious frequently intersect with these divisions. Through a series of case studies focusing on South Asia, we will investigate how communities construct these boundaries legally and informally, how these boundaries have changed over time, and how minority communities contest the dominant forms of these boundaries. Through this study, we will theorize about the relation of religions to various aspects of human experience and the accuracy of different representations of these relationships in both society and scholarship.

In this room, we become a community of scholars, constantly refining our academic skills as well as developing our understanding of various subjects. Approaching religions in an academic setting requires that we think critically to analyze the persuasiveness and biases that our sources of information present. We need to approach a range of viewpoints with both a willingness to question them and an equal willingness to appreciate their strengths. To make the class successful, each scholar must listen respectfully to the opinions of others and contribute their insights honestly. No one has to accept a particular viewpoint, but everyone needs to understand the variety of opinions and the reasoning behind those opinions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Scholars in Rel 483 will

- 1) Apply methods and theories of the human sciences to the data of religions in South Asia.
- 2) Be able to critically discriminate between reliable and less reliable information from a variety of sources for religions in South Asia.
- 3) Become familiar with the scholarly and research methods that pertain to the study of religion.
- 4) Be able to describe the complexity of religious boundaries and its influence on religious identities in Asia.
- 5) Develop effective written and oral communication skills.

READINGS

The following texts are required. Additional articles will be made available during the term on the course webpage and on eLearning.

Flueckiger, Joyce. *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Venacular Islam in South India*. Indiana University Press, 2006.

Nandy, Ashis. *Exiled at Home: Comprising At the Edge of Psychology, The Intimate Enemy and Creating a Nationality*. Oxford Press, 2005.
Jaffrey, Madhur. *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India*. Vintage. 2007.

CONSULTATIONS

All scholars are encouraged to come to my office hours, set up an appointment, and/or contact me by phone (348-4218), or email sramey@bama.ua.edu for assistance.

Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate routine absences. Although I cannot guarantee that reasonable accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance our ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you.

Scholars with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact me as soon as possible to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodations that can be made to meet their needs. Scholars must also contact the Office of Disability Services in Martha Parham East.

GRADING

Attendance/Participation	200 points
6 Presentations (33 points each)	200 points
4 Response papers (50 points each)	200 points
Literature Review	100 points
Final Paper	300 points

Final grades will be based on the following ranges: 930-1000 = A; 900-929 = A-; 870-899 = B+; 830-869 = B; 800-829 = B-; 770-799 = C+; 730-769 = C; 700-729 = C-; 600-699 = D; 0-599 = F

All academic work must be the product of the scholar submitting it. Cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and acknowledgment) is a serious offence. If I discover that a scholar has copied the work of another author (whether a peer, classmate, or published author), the case will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

The success of this course requires the contribution of all scholars. When you are absent, you miss an opportunity to learn from the other scholars, and they miss an opportunity to learn from you. More than 3 absences of any type will significantly impact your attendance /participation grade. If the absences are beyond your control due to health or family reasons, let me know as soon as possible. The impact of such excused absences may be reduced. If you are late, please join the class as soon as possible without disrupting the learning experience. Habitual tardiness, however, is unacceptable and can be counted as an absence. You remain responsible for anything that you miss, including announcements. If you miss a scheduled test or presentations, you can only make-up the event with a documented, excused absence. All make-up tests will be oral.

Your positive participation in the class is also vital. Participation goes beyond the number of words someone speaks to include both their contribution to the overall class and their attentiveness. I expect everyone to speak up during classes. Be prepared to ask questions about the readings and class material and/or contribute your own ideas or analysis. Disruptive behavior or disrespect shown to others will not be tolerated.

PRESENTATIONS

Each scholar must make six presentations over the course of the semester. Each scholar must present on specific readings (readings marked SP on schedule) two times during the semester, according to the sign-up that will happen the first full week of classes. One presentation (February 12) is a group presentation detailing the analysis of textbook representations of specific religions in South Asia. A fourth relates to a selected Hindu movement (February 19). Each scholar will also make two presentations related to their research project, the first on the preliminary Literature Review and the second on the ongoing research. Each of these presentations will include questions and comments from other scholars that will allow the presenting scholar to deepen and advance the research before the final paper is submitted. Further details about the presentations will be presented during the semester. Missed presentations can only be made up if arrangements are made ahead of time or a verifiable excuse is presented (see Attendance and Participation).

RESPONSE PAPERS

Each scholar will write four response papers of approximately one page each. The first response paper will relate to the film watched during class (Jan. 29 and 31), describing the scholar's response to the film in conversation with the ideas and issues discussed in class. The second essay will be a response paper to the small group exercise conducted during the week of February 5. Both of these are due February 12. The other two response papers are due in class when a scholar makes a presentation related to the readings. These response papers should consist of first a summary of the main points of the assigned segment of the reading and then a response to the reading in conversation with the ideas and issues discussed in class.

Because expressing ideas persuasively is a vital skill, I will grade the response papers both for the quality of the critical evaluation and application of course ideas and for the quality of the writing. The short length of the essay requires careful thought and the development of a focused assertion. Please attend to the general writing guidelines available on the course webpage for all writing assignments.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH PAPER

Each scholar must research and write an 8+ page paper on a topic of his / her own choosing. This selection must take place in consultation with the professor, and everyone must select their topic by February 26. On March 27, each scholar must submit a review of the literature on the topic (minimum length 3 pages, though longer reviews are acceptable). The minimum number of sources will vary, depending on the topic. After locating sources, each scholar should consult with me prior to the due date to clarify minimum sources for the literature review. The paper should summarize the central arguments/ideas of the literature on the selected topic, highlighting the questions for further research / analysis that the existing literature raises (implicitly or explicitly).

Each research paper must be a formal academic paper presenting your analysis of the material in the light of sources in the class and outside of the class. I expect quality academic research making use of the peer-reviewed journals and books in Gorgas Library. Although the nature of sources varies by topic, to conduct quality research, you need a minimum of six works cited, and no more than half of them can be Internet sources. If you have questions about conducting research, please consult with me and the research librarians in Gorgas. Further details will be provided during the semester. The papers will serve as the final exam and are due at the time set by the University for the Final Exam (8 May). Anything submitted more than a day after the due date cannot be accepted because of the necessity of submitting final grades.