Course Description:

This course offers an introduction to the diverse yet interrelated traditions of practice and thought that together have contributed to the development of what has come to be called “Hinduism.” Over the course of the semester, students will have the opportunity to explore the central concepts, images, mythologies, and philosophies that have continuously shaped and reshaped Hindu religious traditions over the past four millennia. Among the topics to be considered are the relationship between Hinduism and its particular social and political contexts, its practice in urban and rural India, its relationship to other religious traditions, as well as contemporary questions of Hindu identity both in South Asia and the diaspora. Through a broad survey of these and related issues, students will develop fluency in the core vocabulary of Hinduism. Primary sources have been selected to allow students direct access to Hindu religious traditions, while secondary literature serves to nuance students’ understanding of these materials. All course readings are in English, and no prior knowledge of Hinduism or India is presumed.
Course Objectives:

In addition to the thematic concerns described above, this course aims to develop the following skills:
- Critically reading and analyzing complex primary and secondary sources
- Expressing ideas and arguments cogently, coherently, and effectively in both writing and class discussion
- Using film as an important resource for the academic study of religion
- Conducting ethnographic fieldwork and interviews

Course Requirements:

1. **Class Participation** – All students are expected to come to each class having read the required materials and to actively engage in classroom discussions.

2. **Short Responses** – Beginning September 2nd, students will be required to submit short written responses to the assigned readings. Responses are designed to encourage deeper engagement with the key concepts analyzed in the course, to facilitate classroom discussion, and to reward students for completing the assigned readings. While these responses may be informal, they are expected to be composed in full, grammatical sentences, to contain at least one question pertaining to the reading, and to run no more than 150 words. These responses will be submitted electronically the day before the relevant class, no later than 11:59 p.m. Late responses will not be accepted. Students are allowed a total of four “passes” during the course of the semester for which they will not be required to submit responses.

3. **Film Review** – Three films will be screened throughout the semester. Students will be responsible for writing a 3-4 pages review on one of these films. The review is to provide a critical analysis of the film that ties it back to the course readings and classroom discussions. Reviews are to be submitted electronically exactly one week after the film is screened.

4. **Essay or Ethnography** – A 7-8 page paper (12 pt. font, double-spaced, excluding a formal title page and bibliography) is due on the last day of class. This paper may take one of two forms:
   a. Final Research Essay: Students are free to develop their own topic provided it relates to the study of Hindu religious traditions. Students must incorporate at least one primary and one secondary source beyond assigned course readings into the paper. If selecting this option, students are strongly encouraged to discuss the proposed topic and potential sources with the instructor during office hours well before the deadline.
   b. Final Ethnographic Essay: Students may visit a Hindu religious center in the Greater Boston Area and submit an ethnographic essay based on their visit. A list of local centers will be distributed to students. In addition to describing the center and its activities, this essay must include an original analysis of some component of the visit (e.g. an interview) which the student deems particularly significant. Furthermore, students must incorporate at least one primary and one
secondary source (either from or beyond the assigned course readings) into the paper.

5. **Final Exam** – The final examination will be cumulative and evaluate students’ comprehension of assigned readings and class lectures.

**Calculation of Grade:**

1. Class Participation 10%
2. Short Responses (20x1) 20%
3. Film Review 15%
4. Essay or Ethnography 25%
5. Final Exam 30%

Total 100%

**Course Policies:**

I. **Academic Integrity**
Academic integrity is foundational to the ethos of the university. Any academic dishonesty, ranging from cheating to plagiarism, is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with formally. Ignorance of the rules does not pardon you from the repercussions of violating university policies concerning academic integrity. For more information about how to promote academic integrity at Brandeis, see [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai).

II. **Absences and Late Assignments:**
Students are required to inform the instructor beforehand if they cannot attend a particular class. Please note that lecture notes will not be distributed to students, and thus students must obtain missed lecture notes from colleagues in the class.

Late assignments will be assessed a penalty of 3% per day. Assignments submitted more than one week after the deadline has passed will not be accepted.

III. **Accessibility:**
Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see [http://www.brandeis.edu/acserv/disabilities/](http://www.brandeis.edu/acserv/disabilities/).

IV. **Academic and Writing Support:**
All students are encouraged to take advantage of the University’s Writing Center. For more information, see [http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/](http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/).

V. **Email Protocol:**
The primary method of communicating with the instructor is via email. Emails must adhere to the following guidelines:
1. Use your university email account. Emails from private accounts will not be read.
2. Please include the course number in the subject line, along with a brief description of the query. Include your full name in the body of the email.
3. Every effort will be made to respond to emails within 48 hours. Please do not send follow-up emails within this window.

Additionally, it is your responsibility to regularly check your university email account for official emails and announcements from the instructor.

**Course Materials:**

The following materials will be made available for purchase. All other materials are either available online or will be placed on course reserve for students to borrow and photocopy.


**Course Outline:**

**I. August 28th**: Introduction

General introduction to the course and overview of the syllabus.

*The Origins of Indic Culture*

**II. September 2nd**: The Indus Valley Civilization and the “Āryan” Debate

2. “Introduction” and “Mohenjo-Daro” at [www.mohenjodaro.net](http://www.mohenjodaro.net); “Introduction” and examine images at [www.harappa.com](http://www.harappa.com)
The Foundations of the Vedic Tradition

III. September 4th: The Ritual World of the Vedas


IV. September 9th: The Sacred Fire


In class screening: Altar of Fire

The Upaniṣads and Early Philosophical Speculation

V. September 11th: Śramaṇa Traditions and Ascetic Contemplation


VI. September 16th: Internalizing the Ritual


*****FILM REVIEW FOR ALTAR OF FIRE DUE*****

Dharma and the Social Order

VII. September 18th: Dharma, Caste, and the Brahmanical Worldview I


VIII. September 23rd: Dharma, Caste, and the Brahmanical Worldview II


The Epics and Classical Indian Thought

IX. September 25th: *****ROSH HASHANAH: NO CLASS*****

X. September 30th: The Rāmāyaṇa and Divine Kingship

1. Flood, An Introduction to Hinduism: 103-127
XI. October 2nd: Rāma: The Ambiguous Exemplar


In class screening: Sita Sings the Blues

XII. October 7th: The Mahābhārata and the Subtleties of Dharma


XIII. October 9th. ****SUKKOT – NO CLASS*****
*****FILM REVIEW FOR SITA SINGS THE BLUES DUE*****

XIV. October 13th: Non-Attached Action in the Bhagavad-gītā


XV. October 14th: Classical Hindu Philosophy – The Six Darṣanas


Theistic Traditions: Bhakti and Tantra

XVI. October 16: *****SHMINI ATZERET – NO CLASS*****

XVII. October 21st: Viṣṇu and His Avatāras

1. Flood, An Introduction to Hinduism: 128-147
2. Dimmit and van Buitenen, Classical Hindu Mythology: 3-14, 59-68, 71-84.

XVIII. October 23rd: The Rise of Vernacular Bhakti


XIX. October 28th: Śiva and the Tantric Path

XX. October 30th: The Goddess as Power


Hindu Rituals and the Place of Women

XXI. November 4th: Hindu Rituals


XXII. November 6th: Hinduism and Gender


Colonialism, Modern Hinduism, and the Politics of Religious Identity

XXIII. November 11th: Ethics and Practical Vedānta


XXIV. November 13th: The Women’s Question


XXV. November 18th: Hindu Nationalism

XXVI. November 20th: Militant Hinduism


In class screening: Ram ke Naam

XXVII. November 25th: *****NO CLASS*****

XXVIII. November 27th: *****THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS*****

*****FILM REVIEW FOR RAM KE NAAM DUE*****

XXIX. December 2nd: Hinduism in Contemporary Media and Visual Culture


XXX. December 4th: Cosmopolitanism and the Hindu Diaspora


*****FINAL PAPERS DUE*****