

**Hinduism**  
**Religion 840:224**  
**Winter Session Study Abroad**  
**December 29, 2020-January 14, 2021**

Instructors:

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**Time and Place:**

Vraja Institute  
380 Sheetal Chaya Raman Reti  
Vrindavan UP 281121 India

The three-credit course runs from December 29, 2020 -January 14, 2021 in India. All students are expected to arrive at the Vraja Institute by the morning of December 29.

**Logistics:**

Group transportation is provided from the Delhi Airport to the Vraja Institute on December 28<sup>th</sup>. Orientation begins on December 29<sup>th</sup>. Students reside at Vraja Institute, where they also attend classes and receive three vegetarian meals daily. The Vraja Institute is gated and offers 24hr. security. The course fee includes tuition, accommodation, three daily meals plus snacks, all-in country transportation, international health insurance, all tours and excursions. Flights to India, course books, and student visas are not included in the program fee.

Participants must acquire *Visas* to enter India. Students are also encouraged to consult a travel doctor prior to departure.

**Course Description:**

The course will attempt an initial introduction to the plethora of traditions and cultural expressions grouped under the heuristic label of 'Hinduism,' with a subsequent more in depth focus on the Krishna devotional tradition. The academic component will involve the study of two general texts on Hinduism intended to provide a panoramic glimpse at some of its variegatedness, and two texts central to the Krishna tradition, one philosophical, and one Epic. The cultural component will consist of an immersive exposure to the socio-cultural world of Vrindavan, sacred to Krishna, where the course takes place.

In class, emphasis will be directed both to examining the philosophy and world-view of the course texts, and to considering their presentations of sacred history, ultimate reality, and self-transformation. Careful attention will be directed to considering the contextual socio-cultural and ideological world which inform these texts, and which they in turn inform, with a focus on how such traditions are reconfigured and manifest in the real life present-day religious landscape of Vrindavan. Outside of class, the course will provide encounters with the lived aspects of Hindu devotionalism by including tours to Vrindavan devotional sites, and exposure to a variety of Vrindavan cultural forms such as music, drama, pilgrimage, architecture, ritual, meditative practices and Ayurvedic health principles and practices.

Devotional sites include Krishna's birthplace, the sacred Yamuna river, walking tours to prominent places of pilgrimage, and numerous visits to pre-modern and modern temples. Students tour a modern art gallery, the extensive collections of the Mathura museum, the local manuscript and iconography preservation center, a cow sanctuary, and participate in a traditional festival taking place at that time. They will also attend cultural performances in music, dance, and drama.

**Course Prerequisites:**

None.

**Course Requirements:**

All assigned reading. Students are suggested to read the entirety of Knott's *Hinduism: An Introduction* and Eck's *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image* before arriving in Vrindavan, as familiarity with the main contours of these texts will be assumed for the reading responses and exams. There will be two cumulative exams on the readings. Students are expected to write four short (500 word) reading response papers. Course participation in class, cultural programs, and cultural excursions is required.

**Grading:**

The midterm exam accounts for 25% of the final grade, and final exam 40%. The reading response papers account for 25%. Class attendance and participation account for the remaining 10%. Students are expected to participate in all cultural programs and excursions. **No** make-ups for missed exams will be given other than in the event of an emergency.

A = 100-90 B+ = 89-87; B = 86-80; C+ = 79-77; C = 76-70; D = 69-65; F = 64 and below.

Please note that outstanding class participation can make a difference between grades.

**Required Course Books**

***IMPORTANT: Students are responsible for obtaining their own books before arrival.***

***Course books are not available in India.***

Eck, Diana. *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Bryant, Edwin *Krishna: the Beautiful Legend of God: Srimad Bhagavata Purana Book X* London, Penguin 2003.

Knott, Kim. *Hinduism: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Miller, Barbara Stoler. *The Bhagavad Gita: Krishna's Counsel in the Time of War*. New York, Bantam Classics, 1986.

**Schedule:**

**12/29: Orientation**

**Class 1: 12/30**

- Focus: Brief overview of Hinduism; notions of Hindu identity; textual taxonomies, the socio-cultural world of *varna-ashrama dharma*, the diversity of perspectives comprising Hinduism.
- Reading: Knott (entire)
- Cultural Excursion: Vrindavan Research Institute

#### **Class 2: 12/31**

- Focus: overview of ritual, sacred icon, divine presence, temple worship, festivals, and pilgrimage; the religio-philosophical schools in Hinduism
- Reading: Eck (entire)
- Cultural Program: Karnataka Drama & Dance Performance

#### **Class 3: 1/1**

- Focus: metaphysics and ontology in the primary schools of Hinduism; Epic and the context of *Bhagavad Gita*
- Reading: *Bhagavad Gita*, introduction
- Cultural Excursion: Pilgrimage walking tour of Vrindavan Dham

#### **Class 4: 1/2**

- Focus: hermeneutics and textual Transmission; *karma* and rebirth; the *yoga* of existential dejection and knowledge in *Bhagavad Gita*; monism, monotheism and polytheism.
- Reading: *Bhagavad Gita*, ch.1-2
- Cultural Excursion: Pre-Modern Vrindavan Temples: Madan Mohan, Radha Damodar, Radha Govinda, Radha Ramana

#### **Class 5: 1/3**

- Focus: *yoga* of action; gnosis, renunciation, meditation, and wisdom in *Bhagavad Gita*
- Reading: *Bhagavad Gita*, ch.3-7
- Cultural Excursion: Taj Mahal

#### **Class 6: 1/4**

- Focus: *Om*; *bhakti yoga*; divine manifestations and incarnation; and the cosmic form in *Bhagavad Gita*
- Reading: *Bhagavad Gita*, ch.8-13
- Cultural Excursion: Samadhi Sites and Bagicha Tour

#### **Class 7: 1/5**

- Focus: phenomenal substratum and the path of liberation in *Bhagavad Gita*
- Reading: *Bhagavad Gita*, ch.14-18
- Cultural Excursion: Modern Temples & Iconography: Maa Vaishno Devi Dham, Prem Mandir, Kanhai Arts

#### **Class 8: 1/6 Mid-Term Exam**

#### **Class 9: 1/7**

- Focus: Krishna's Birth; historical context; philosophy, *yoga*, sociology; and the written word.
- Reading: *Bhagavata Purana*, Book X, introduction, ch.1-3
- Cultural Excursion: Pilgrimage tour of Yamuna River & Laksmi Temple

#### **Class 10: 1/8**

- Focus: The power of devotion and God's subservience to the devotee; Lila: Krishna as mischievous child, and divine play with mother Yashoda; Krishna's defeat of various demons; the bewilderment of Brahma
- Reading: *Bhagavata Purana*, Book X, ch.4-21
- Cultural Excursion: *Care for Cows* Sanctuary

#### **Class 11: 1/9**

- Focus: God as protector: Krishna's lifting of Mount Govardhana; God as lover: the divine *rasa* dance; Love of God in separation: Krishna's departure from Vrindavan.
- Reading: *Bhagavata Purana*, Book X, ch.22-40
- Cultural Excursion: Mathura Museum & Krishna Birthplace Temple

#### **Class 12: 1/10**

- Focus: Krishna's arrival in Mathura; God as chastiser: killing of the demon king Kamsa; marriage to Rukmini, and birth of Pradumna.
- Reading: *Bhagavata Purana*, Book X, ch.41-59
- Cultural Program: Odissi Dance Performance

#### **Class 13: 1/11**

- Focus: The Epic Krishna: journey to Indraprastha; and the meeting of the kings.
- Reading: *Bhagavata Purana*, Book X, ch.60-73
- Pilgrimage Tour of Govardhan Hill & Kusum Sarovar Temple

#### **Class 14: 1/12**

- Reading: Krishna as destroyer of the demons: the killing of Sishupala and the condemnation of Duryodhana. Krishna and the downtrodden: generosity to Shridama.
- Focus: Reading: *Bhagavata Purana*, Book X, ch.74-90
- Cultural Program: Sitar & Tabla Classical Concert

#### **Class 15: 1/13 Final Exam**

#### **1/14: Departure**