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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 12-1:30PM

## ANS 340/RS 364: Hinduism in US Popular Culture

The University of Texas at Austin  
MW 2:30-4PM  
JES A205A  
Fall 2018



“The seduction lay in the chaos. They thought they were simple. We thought they were neon. They thought we were profound. We knew we were provincial. Everybody thought everybody else was ridiculously exotic and everybody got it wrong.”

- Gita Mehta, *Karma Cola*

### Course Description:

Postural yoga, personal mantras, Ohm tattoos, the Color Run™, American-born gurus, and spiritual tourism to India: all are testament to the fact that religious symbols and beliefs derived from Indian culture have found new and re-imagined life in contemporary America. In this course we will examine this process of transmission and exchange, with a focus on understanding how religious ideas and symbols take on new meaning as they spread to new geographies. We will critically examine key terms and lenses (ex. popular culture, Hinduism, orientalism) challenging ourselves to reflect on the cultural, political, and historical processes that have impacted Americans' views of South Asia and South Asians. In this respect, we will have occasion to consider aspects of culture that are not distinctly “Hindu,” but nevertheless teach us something about how Western popular culture imagines the “Mystic East” at various points. Our snapshots of American culture range from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present, focusing on first encounters, media representations, literature, charismatic leaders, and consumer culture.

**Course Objectives:**

1. Learn to use critical theory to analyze culture. In particular, develop an understanding of Said's *Orientalism* (1978). We will examine its import and usefulness for the study of South Asia, as well as consider critical responses to it;
2. Introduce students to the primary sources from which numerous cultural and religious symbols associated with South Asia in contemporary America are drawn.
3. Challenge students to reflect on how and why elements of classical texts and Indian religious practices have been embraced, adapted, exoticized, and in some cases, rejected, by American audiences at different points in time. In particular, students will be asked to consider how social sensibilities and political climates mediated Americans' responses to these ideas and practices;
4. Challenge students to reflect on definitions of religion and consider the processes through which religious ideas and symbols spread to new locations.

**Required Texts:**

Iwamura, Jane Naomi (2011). *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jain, Andrea R. (2015). *Selling Yoga. From Counterculture to Pop Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mehta, Gita (1994, reprint). *Karma Cola*. New York: Vintage International.

Miller, Barbara Stoller, trans. (1986). *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War*. New York: Bantam Books.

Course Pack available from: <https://squareup.com/store/paradigmbooks/>

**Course Requirements:**

Attendance and Participation: 25%

Reading Responses (10): 30%

Tumblr Posts (5): 10%

Final Paper (proposal, draft, final, peer review): 25%

Book Review: 10%

**University Policies:**

*Honor Code:* The core values of UT Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

*Scholastic Dishonesty and Academic Integrity:* Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work. Students who violate University rules on academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. "Scholastic dishonesty" includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to give unfair academic advantage to the student (such as, but not limited to, submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor, providing false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension

on a test, quiz, or other assignment), or the attempt to commit such an act. For further information please visit the Student Judicial Services Web site: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>.

*Documented Disability Statement:* UT Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone) or <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/>.

*Religious Observances:* By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

*Mental Health Resources:* Mental health concerns such as anxiety, stress, and depression are very common among college students. If you are struggling with any of these or other mental health concerns, you are not alone! I encourage you to seek help and to encourage others who need help to do so. There is a 24/7 Crisis Line for UT students: 512-471-CALL (2255). Additionally, the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) can be reached at 512-471-3515 during regular hours. There are a variety of self-care programs (MindBody Labs, etc.) available to students in addition to more traditional counseling services.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC
W, 8/29	Introduction
	<b>UNIT 1: Guiding Questions &amp; Theory</b>
M, 9/3	Holiday, No Class
W, 9/5	What is Popular Culture?
M, 9/10	What is Hinduism? Part 1
W, 9/13	What is Hinduism? Part 2

M, 9/17	Orientalism
W, 9/19	Intro to "The Oriental Monk"
M, 9/24	The Oriental Monk: D.T. Suzuki
W, 9/26	Visions of Zen & Vedanta: 1950s
M, 10/1	The Oriental Monk: Maharishi
W, 10/3	Euro-American Visions of the Maharishi
	<b>UNIT 2: The Yogas: Jñāna, Karma, Bhakti, Postural</b>
M, 10/8	<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>
W, 10/10	Jñāna Yoga & Ralph Waldo Emerson
M, 10/15	Karma Yoga & Henry David Thoreau
W, 10/17	Bhakti Yoga & Walt Whitman
M, 10/22	Krishna Bhakti: Early Sources
W, 10/24	Krishna Bhakti: ISKCON & Hare Krishnas
M, 10/29	History of Yoga
W, 10/31	Postural Yoga as Religious Practice
	<b>UNIT 3: The Guru</b>
M, 11/5	Tantra
W, 11/7	Rajneesh / OSHO
M, 11/12	Role of the Guru
W, 11/14	Guru in America
M, 11/19	The Guru in film

W, 11/21	Holiday, NO CLASS
	<b>UNIT 4: Spiritual Tourism &amp; Voices of Protest</b>
M, 11/26	<i>Karma Cola</i>
W, 11/28	Spiritual Tourism
M, 12/3	Voices of Protest
W, 12/5	Critiquing Images of Hinduism in Popular Culture
M, 12/10	Thoughts for the Future: Looking Back, Moving Forward
F, 12/14	EXAM