Religious Studies 108A, winter 2010
Tu-Th 3:15–5:05, 320-220

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Ask about walking office hours

The Rāmāyāṇa—perhaps the most popular and influential story in South Asia over the last two millennia—is intertwined with the histories of religion, performance, arts and literature, cultural values, and political identities in the Indian subcontinent. It is beloved and contested. Rama and Sita, its hero and heroine, are widely worshiped as avatars of the supreme God and Goddess and as models ideal manhood and womanhood. Mighty Hanuman, a hero in monkey form and an embodiment of selfless devotion, is a revered Hindu deity. The Rāmāyāṇa’s countless textual and performative versions range from the great Sanskrit poem of Valmiki composed at least 2,000 years ago to medieval vernacular masterpieces, rural women's folk songs, classical dance, folk drama, and the 100+–episode blockbuster TV serial of the late 1980s. We will study the story in many forms, including a number of literary, film and performative versions. The Rāmāyāṇa narrative tradition will become a window to the study of religion through such categories as sacred texts, myth, deities, devotion, performance, popular culture, gender, and politics. 30-50 minutes of each meeting will be devoted to film and other media. The first three classes will include essential background on Hinduism.

Books


Reader (sold in class). Bibliographic information on readings other than Sattar are in Reader Table of Contents.

Class Schedule

Jan 5  Intro
Media: Rāmāyāṇa portion of Great Tales in Asian Art
Pictures (will be shown & discussed in class):

Jan 7  Bālākānda: frame story, Ayodhya, King Daśaratha, making sons, crowning prince Ram
• Paula Richman, from intro to Rāmāyāṇa Stories in Modern South India online. Type book title into library catalog & click; at book site click link to e-book; click Introduction. We’re reading pp 2-12 of original book, which is pp 29-39 of the e-document (numbers on upper right). Start at “Foundations,” conclude at mid-page on 39. Under InfoTools, there’s a box where you can magnify the page up to 200%.
• A.K. Ramanujan, “300 Rāmāyaṇas,” 22-48;
• Sattar 3-4, 10-19, 26-34, 102-04, 107 (starting at last para.)-109
• Goldman trans. frame story.
  Media: TV depiction of composers of Rāmāyaṇ; Lav-Kush in 2 versions

Jan 12  Ayodhyākāṇḍa: trouble in paradise, 3 queens & a maid, life in Ayodhya, going into exile
  Sattar 110-59, 67-72;
  Media: Thumak chalat rāmāchandra bhajan in 2 versions.
  Ram departs for forest, NDTV version

Jan 14  The Hindi Rāmāyaṇ and devotional/ritual performance
  Philip Lutgendorf, The Life of a Text, 1-12, 53-112
  Media: Mukesh singing Mānas

Jan 19  Performance & devotion

Jan 21  Performance (no class meeting – all go to evening film)
  Stuart Blackburn, “Creating Conversations: The Rāma Story as Puppet Play in Kerala”; Philip Lutgendorf, “All in the (Raghu) Family: A Video Epic in Cultural Context”

  JAN 21, 6:30 pm: FILM ON KERALA PUPPET PERFORMANCE, Q&A with filmmakers Anurag Wadehra and Salil Singh, Cummings Art Bldg, Room 4

Jan 26  Aranyakāṇḍa: Śūrpanakhā
  Sattar, 242-61; Tulsidas’s 16 th cent. Hindi version of episode;(4 pp); Kamban’s 12 th.-cent. Tamil Rāmāyaṇa, patalam 5, trans. George Hart & Hank Heifetz;
  Media: TV version.

Jan 28  Śūrpanakhā: regional differences, gender & nation
  Media: Lajja 1

Feb 2  Aranyakāṇḍa: abduction of Sita
  Media: Pinjar excerpt

Feb 4  Sundarakāṇḍa
  Hanuman’s flight to Lanka in two literary versions. Sattar, 405-top of 407 (“blazing comet”), 414-68; Sundarkāṇḍ of Tulsidas, trans. Lutgendorf.
  Media: TV episode; range of images of Hanuman (including political)

Feb 9  Devotion to Hanuman
  Krishna Das, excerpts from Flow of Grace: Chanting the Hanuman Chalisa.
  Philip Lutgendorf, "Monkey in the Middle: the Status of Hanuman in Popular Hinduism";
  Media: songs to Hanuman
  Lajja 2

Feb 11  Uttarākāṇḍa: Abandonment of Sita
Feb 16 Gender, cont.
Media: Lajja 3

Feb 18 Nationalism
Media: In the Name of God (1)

Feb 23 Nationalism, cont. Late 20th-century battles in Ayodhya.
Richard Davis, “The Iconography of Ram’s Chariot”
Media: In the Name of God (2)

Feb 25 Caste & Ethnicity (1)
Richman, “Why Can’t a Śūdra Perform Asceticism? Śambūka in Three Modern South Indian Plays”
Media: We are not your monkeys and excerpts from Ambedkar

Mar 2 Caste & Ethnicity (2)
Richman, “E.V. Ramasami’s Reading of the Rāmāyaṇa.”
Lutgendorf, “Dining Out at Lake Pampa: The Shabari Episode in Multiple Rāmāyaṇas”
Media: TV version

Mar 4 Gender, cont.
Hess, “Rejecting Sita: Indians Respond to the Ideal Man’s Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife.”
Media: Sita Sings the Blues

Mar 9 presentations

Mar 11 presentations

Requirements and Grading

Attendance and participation are very important. All the readings must be done before the class for which they are assigned.

For weeks 2-5, we’ll have weekly response papers of 2-3 pp each that refer to readings, media, and other class activities. You’ll get guidelines for the form of the response papers. Also, please prepare—and expect to be asked to offer—at least one question for discussion on the readings for each meeting.

For the second half of the course, everyone will choose a topic for a paper of 8-12 pages, due the last week of class. A list of suggested topics will be provided, though you can also formulate your own topic in consultation with me.

Deadlines:
Response papers are due electronically on Fridays at 5 pm: Jan 15, 22, 29, Feb. 5. They will be graded, and grades will be affected by lateness.
Proposal for final paper is due electronically on Sun. Feb. 14 at 5 pm. It should have 2-3 paragraphs, explaining why you are interested in the topic, what materials you expect to use, and what questions you would like to address. I’ll give feedback, which will lead to refinement of the project. The proposal won’t be graded, but getting it in on time will be a factor in the final grade.

Meet with me between Feb. 23 and Mar. 2. At that time you’ll present an annotated list of sources and an outline, and we’ll discuss the whole project.

Give a presentation in the last week.

Paper is due at the beginning of class on Tues. Mar. 9.

Grading percentages:
Attendance & participation: 25%
Response papers: 28% (7% each)
Final paper: 42%