DEATH AND DYING IN INDIAN RELIGIONS:
CADAVERS, CROWS, AND CREMATION

ANS 301M / R S 312
Mon., Wed., and Fri. 1-2 p.m. / RAS 215
Office Hours: Mon., Wed. 2-3 / MEZ 3.310

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DESCRIPTION

Death is a central concern for all religious systems. Peter Berger (1967), a sociologist who has written on religion, says: “Witnessing the death of others (notably, of course, of significant others) and anticipating his own death, the individual is strongly propelled to question the ad hoc cognitive and normative operating procedure of his ‘normal’ life in society. Death presents society with a formidable problem not only because of its obvious threat to the continuity of human relationships, but because it threatens the basic assumptions of order on which society rests.” Fear of Death, more specifically the fear of the senselessness that death implies, Berger suggests, requires strategies to make sense of this experience.

This course will examine the variety of ways that Indian religions approach death, dying, and death related issues. We will primarily look at historical attitudes toward death as expressed in religious literature. Additionally, we will examine archaeological material to glean more information about how Indians memorialize, remember, and dispose of the dead. We will take an interdisciplinary approach, examining the issues around death from many angles: religious, social, cultural, philosophical, ethical, and medical.

Throughout this course we will use Berger’s notion that religion gives meaning to our experiences, Death in particular, to frame our discussions. How does religion make sense of Death? How does a particular religious ritual, narrative, doctrine, or experience restore the order that Berger suggests is undermined by the conception of death, one's own and of our significant others? Does using Berger’s question to approach religious responses to Death efface other important issues?

The student should set the following goals for their enrollment in this class: 1) to acquire a basic knowledge of the history and culture of Indian religions; 2) to understand how those religions understand death and dying; 3) to develop the ability to think both empathetically and critically about religious claims; 4) to develop the ability to convey that understanding in writing.

TEXTS

All Class Readings are included in a Course Packet available at Paradigm Copy Center and are available on Blackboard. All Bonus Readings are available on the Blackboard page for this class.
**Evaluation**

**Class Attendance and Participation** are crucial to your success in this class. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. You will be allowed three absences throughout the semester. Any absences in excess of this will directly affect your grade. You will be expected not only to have read all assigned readings by class period, but also to have reflected upon them. Participation can be as easy as asking for clarification on a concept, or as challenging as trying to engage the instructor directly on the relevance of the material to your everyday life. Participation is the best way to ensure you understand the material, and that is the best way to ensure you do well in the class.

There will be one **Short Quiz**, which will assess your knowledge of a smaller section of the course. The quiz will be composed of multiple choice and short answer questions. This will be the best indicator for how well you are absorbing the material, and how well you will do on the exams and essays. The Short Quiz will be on September 18th.

**Essay One** will give you the opportunity to develop the ability to express the ideas you have learned in class in writing. This assignment is to be two pages in length. (Two normal size sheets with default Word margins with 12 pt font.) You will be able to select topics from a list provided by the instructor early in the semester. Essay One will be due by 5:00 p.m. on October 14th.

The **Mid-Term Examination** will assess your knowledge of the material covered in the first half of the class. The Exam will be mainly short answer with one or two short essays. The Mid-Term Exam will be on October 27th.

In **Essay Two** you will need to demonstrate your ability to present an argument. This assignment is five pages in length. (Five normal size sheets with default Word margins with 12 pt font.) Essay Two will be due at the beginning of class on December 1st.

Choose one concept we have discussed in class and discuss at least one way in which that concept answers the questions we are using to frame the class: How does religion make sense of Death? How does a particular religious ritual, narrative, doctrine, or experience restore the order that Berger suggests is undermined by the conception of death, one's own and of our significant others? Does using Berger’s question to approach religious responses to Death efface other important issues?

The **Final Examination** will assess your knowledge of all the material covered in class. The Exam will be mainly short answer with one or two short essays.

The **Bonus Readings** present an opportunity for you to gain exposure to more material than I was able to fit into the Class Readings. Additionally, each Bonus Reading gives you the possibility of extra credit. In exchange for a one page summary of the contents and primary argument of the author—which must demonstrate that you read and understood, to some degree, the essay—one percentage point will be added to your final grade. Thus if you do all ten essays, your grade will be raised by a full letter grade. Your one page summary will be due by the beginning of class on Monday of the following week.

Various aspects of performance will be weighted as listed below:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance and Class Participation</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>Mid-Term Examination</th>
<th>20%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Quiz</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Essay Two</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay One</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>20%</td>
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ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:
“Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University … Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced.
‘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.” (From UT's General Information catalog, Appendix C, Sec. 11-802)

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:
The Faculty Council's Educational Policy Committee states, "Providing a quality educational experience for all students includes adapting the instructional environment to accommodate the educational needs of students with information about Services for Students with Disabilities through the course syllabus."

At the beginning of the semester, students should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) Office (471-6259 or 471-4641 TTY), which will prepare an appropriate letter to the instructor to guide you.

ABSENCE FOR RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS:
The UT General Information catalog for 2005-2006 states that "A student who is absent from a class or examination for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence” (p. 85). Notice must be given at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates the student will be absent. For religious holy days that fall within the first two weeks of the semester, notice should be given on the first day of the semester.
All Bonus Readings are available on Blackboard.

Week One:
(Aug. 30): Introduction
(Sept. 1): Introduction to Death: Hinduism

Week Two:
(Sept. 4): Labor Day Holiday (No Class)
(Sept. 6): Introduction to Death: Hinduism (continued)
(Sept. 8): Introduction to Death: Hinduism (continued)


Week Three:
(Sept. 11): Introduction to Death: Buddhism
(Sept. 13): Introduction to Death: Islam
(Sept. 15): Introduction to Death: Islam (continued)


Week Four:  *(Short Quiz on September 18th)*
(Sept. 18): Confronting Death: Aging

(Sept. 20): Confronting Death: Aging (continued)

(Sept. 22): Confronting Death: Myth


Week Five:

(Sept. 25): Confronting Death: Poetry


(Sept. 27): Confronting Death: The Example of the Buddha


(Sept. 29): Confronting Death: The Example of the Buddha (continued)


Week Six:

(Oct. 2): Confronting Death: Renunciation


(Oct. 4): Confronting Death: Renunciation (continued)

(Oct. 6): Confronting Death: Sati: Widow Sacrifice


Week Seven:  **(Essay One due by 5:00 p.m. October 14th)**

(Oct. 9): Confronting Death: Martyrdom


(Oct. 11): Death Ritual: Sapindikarana


(Oct. 13): No Class (Asian Studies Graduate Conference)


Week Eight:

(Oct. 16): Death Ritual: The Household Texts


(Oct. 18): Death Ritual: Mythic Representations


(Oct. 20): Death Ritual: A Buddhist Take


Week Nine:

(Oct. 23): The Intermediate State


(Oct. 25): The Intermediate State (continued)

(Oct. 27): **Mid-Term**

Week Ten:
(Oct. 30): The Afterlife: Two Paths

(Nov. 1): The Afterlife: The Rig Veda

(Nov. 3): The Afterlife: The Rig Veda (continued)

Week Eleven:
(Nov. 6): The Afterlife: The Road to Hell

(Nov. 8): The Afterlife: Heaven

(Nov. 10): The Afterlife: Return from Hell


Week Twelve:
(Nov. 13): Unnatural Death: Appeasing the Dead

(Nov. 15): Unnatural Death: Possession

(Nov. 17): Unnatural Death: Possession (continued)

Week Thirteen:
   (Nov. 20): Film: Forest of Bliss
   (Nov. 22): Film: Forest of Bliss (continued)
   (Nov. 23): Thanksgiving (No Class)

The film will be shown during normal class time. I will be in Washington D.C. at the annual AAR meeting. If you wish to take off this week, then you must find time to view the movie before November 27th. A DVD of the film will available for checkout at the PCL throughout the semester.

Week Fourteen: (Essay Two Due December 1st.)
   (Nov. 27): Discussion of Films
   (Nov. 29): Commemoration of the Dead: Hero Stones


(Dec. 1): Commemoration of the Dead: Hero Stones (continued)

Week Fifteen:
   (Dec. 4): Commemoration of the Dead: Cults of the Dead


(Dec. 6): Commemoration of the Dead: Cults of the Dead (continued)
   (Dec. 8): Review For Final