

# My Sweet Lord: Devotion in India

Spring 2013

ANS 372 – unique # 31750 / RS 341 – unique # 43865

MEZ 1.102, TTh 5:00–6:30

Instructor: **Rupert Snell**

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WCH 3.130 — TTh 1:00–2:30

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This English-medium course looks at the various manifestations of devotional religion underlying north Indian culture. Our main focus will be on Hindu bhakti traditions, studied by reading translations of devotional poetry in its historical and cultural context. Most of our sources will be selected from the pre-modern literatures of languages such as Hindi and Bengali, but our search for the roots of these literary traditions will also lead us back to Sanskrit texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Gītagovinda*. We will also examine the three postulates of the course title: “MY” – the personal connection inherent in devotionalism; “SWEET” – the role of aesthetics and sentiment in devotional attitudes; and “LORD” – perceptions of dependence and divine majesty. Students with some knowledge of the religious and cultural “map” of India will be best positioned to benefit from this course; students who know Hindi will find opportunities to read some Hindi texts in the original. The essential prerequisite, however, is an energetic interest in the subject and a desire to study a wide range of remarkable primary literature.

## GRADING

Quizzes on weekly readings	20%
Class discussion & presentation	20%
Four reaction papers @ 5%	20%
Two essays @ 20%	40%

## SUBMISSION DATES

Reaction papers:	February 5, February 26, March 26, April 16.
Essays:	March 5, April 30

Guidelines for the reaction papers and the essays will be given well in advance. You are very welcome to discuss essay plans in office hours: it is your responsibility to arrange this well before the submission date.

There will be a 10-minute quiz on the week's readings, at 5:00 pm in each Tuesday class from the second week onwards; it is therefore *essential* for the health of your grades that you come to class on time and that you have read the assigned material!

Most of the course material will be available on Blackboard. Various handouts will also be given from time to time: make sure you keep this important course material safely in a folder, and bring it to class with you each week.

You must buy the following book (available in paperback from Amazon): J.S. Hawley, *Songs of the saints of India*. Oxford University Press.

Full attendance is required, and will be reflected in your 'participation' grade. The class will be highly interactive and you are encouraged to take a full part in discussions.

## SCHEDULE

January 15th & 17th

### **Myths, Narratives, Histories**

What is devotion? The narrative of Krishna holding Mount Govardhan  
Historiography; puranic “history”; chronologies and timeframes

January 22nd & 24th

### **Conceptions of divinity I**

Devotion through song: Krishna-bhakti in the poetry of Surdas and Mirabai  
QUIZ — Hawley, *Songs of the Saints*, chapters 4 (Surdas) and 5 (Mirabai)

January 29th & 31st

### **Conceptions of divinity II**

The divine name of Rama: *saguṇ* and *nirguṇ* devotion in Tulsidas and Kabir;  
Shaiva bhakti (devotion to Shiva)

QUIZ — Hawley, *Songs of the Saints*, chapters 6 (Tulsidas) and 2 (Kabir);  
Ramanujan, *Speaking of Shiva* (selections)

February 5th & 7th

*Reaction paper 1 — due Tuesday February 5th*

### **Rāmāyaṇa I**

The multiple versions of the epic; narrative, main characters, themes & episodes  
QUIZ — Ramanujan ‘300 Ramayanas’; Narayan (trans.) *The Ramayana*  
(selection)

February 12th & 14th

### **Rāmāyaṇa II**

Devotional attitudes in the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsidas  
Gender and other contemporary issues in screen versions; *Sita Sings the Blues*  
QUIZ — Hess ‘Lovers’ doubts’; Kishwar ‘Yes to Sita, no to Ram’; Lutgendorf  
‘Ramayan: the video’

February 19th & 21st

### **The layers and meanings of Braj I**

The development of the Krishna narrative in Sanskrit and Hindi texts;  
Krishna-lila

QUIZ — Kinsley ‘Without Kṛṣṇa there is no song’; Haberman ‘qq’

February 26th & 28th

*Reaction paper 2 — due Tuesday February 26th*

**The layers and meanings of Braj II**

The *Gītagovinda* & Krishna-Radha themes; eroticism; *rasa* & aesthetics

QUIZ — Miller (trans.) *Gītagovinda* (selections); Haberman, 'Schweig, 'Humility and passion'

March 5th & 7th

*Essay 1 — due Tuesday March 5th*

**Three Braj-based sects**

The concept of *sampradāy* or sect; the formation of *sampradāy* during Mughal reign; three sects compared — Pushti Marg (Vallabha), Gauriya (Caitanya), Radhavallabha.

QUIZ — Bennet, 'In Nanda Baba's house'; Saha 'The movement of bhakti along a north-west axis', Schweig, 'Humility and passion'

**March 12th & 14th - SPRING BREAK**

March 19th & 21st

**Hagiography: lives of the saintly**

The *Bhaktamāla* tradition; the hagiographies of Kabir and other 'poet-saints'; the *Vārtā* chronicles of the Pushti Marg (sect of Vallabha)

QUIZ — Dalmia, 'Forging community'; Barz 'The *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*'

March 26th & 28th

*Reaction paper 3 — due Tuesday March 26th*

**Texts and performance I**

How devotional texts find a life outside and beyond the written tradition; oral performance, drama, Ramlila; exegesis and discussion of *Vārtā* texts in the Pushti Marg

QUIZ — Sax 'The Ramnagar Ramlila'; TBA

April 2nd & 4th

**Texts and performance II**

Vocal styles; Pabuji of Rajasthan & folk traditions; devotional singing & classical music; Varkari *abhaṅgas*

QUIZ — Smith 'Pabuji'; Chitre (trans.) 'Says Tuka: translations of Tukaram' (selections)

April 9th & 11th

**How do we know what we (think we) know?**

The transmission of knowledge; texts, manuscripts, recensions, commentaries  
oral performance, recitation

QUIZ — Hawley 'Author and authority'; TBA

April 16th & 18th

*Reaction paper 4 — due Tuesday April 16th*

**Deities, darshan & the relationships of bhakti**

What happens in temple ritual; *sevā* or 'service' of the deity; the *aṣṭayām* concept  
& liturgy; iconography

QUIZ — Eck, TBA

April 23rd & 25th

**Student presentations**

April 30th & May 2nd

*Essay 2 — due Tuesday April 30th*

**Sacred geography, landscape, maps, religious ecology**

Braj mandal; Ramayana locales; Banaras; *tīrtha* ('fording places') and  
pilgrimage; sacred rivers

QUIZ — Eck 'India's *tīrthas*'; Feldhaus TBA, Maclean 'Seeing, being seen and not  
being seen'