

RELG 545: Ramayana—Multiple Lives

Winter 2021
McGill University
School of Religious Studies

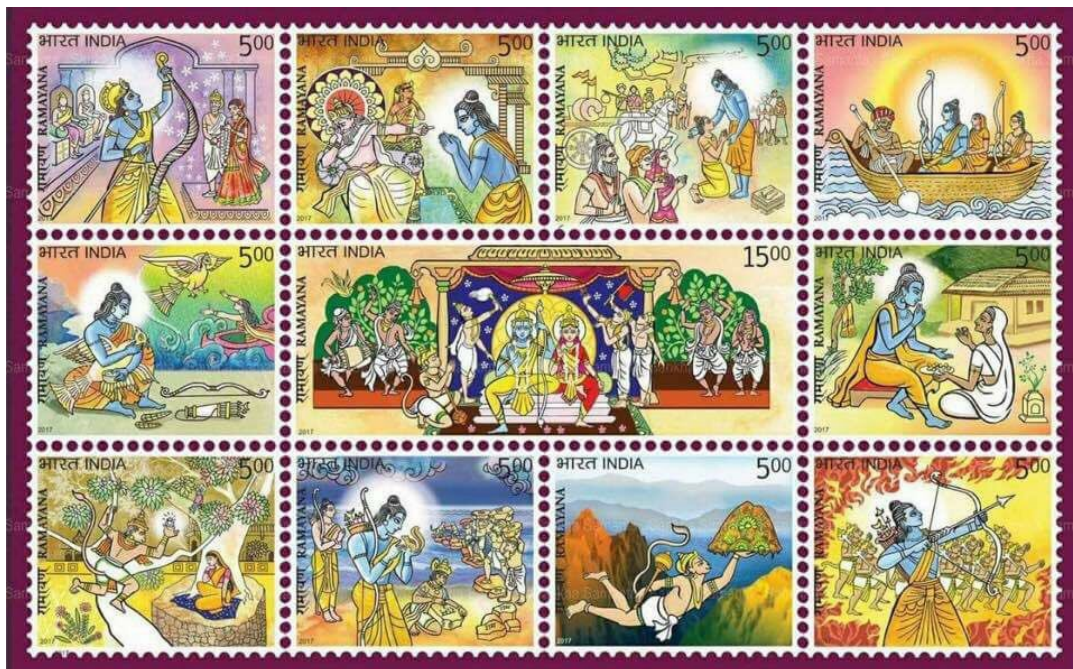
Tuesdays
10:05 – 11:55 AM

Instructor: Hamsa Stainton

Email: hamsa.stainton@mcgill.ca

Office hours: by appointment via phone or Zoom

Note: Due to COVID-19, this course will be offered **remotely via synchronous “live” Zoom class meetings at the scheduled time**. Since this is a discussion-based seminar, these class meetings **will not be recorded**.



Overview

This course focuses on perhaps the most popular and influential of all narratives in South Asia—the story of Rama and Sita. It explores multiple versions of the narrative, from classical Sanskrit texts to rural vernacular retellings to contemporary TV productions, and it examines the various religious, social, cultural, and political significations of the narrative in diverse contexts.

Readings:

There is one required book for the course:

Narayan, R.K. *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic (Suggested by the Tamil Version of Kamban)*. Penguin Books, 1972.

This book is inexpensive and readily available from many online booksellers. Versions from 2006 onward include an introduction by Pankaj Mishra, but this is not necessary; you may obtain any copy that has the full text of Narayan's narration.

All other readings for the course will be available through myCourses. However, we will be reading excerpts from the following books (among others), and they might be of interest for purchase. In some cases, the full volume is available in electronic form through McGill's library system.

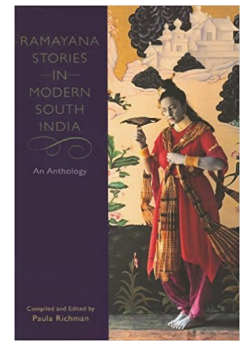
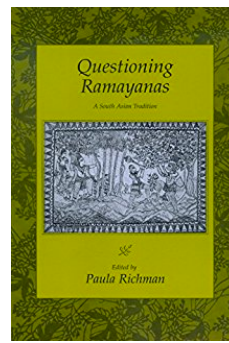
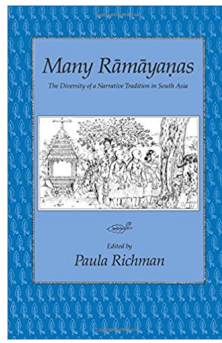
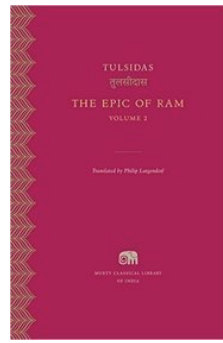
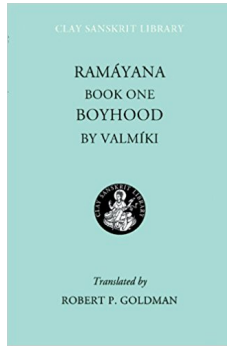
Vālmīki. *Rāmāyaṇa, Book One, Boyhood*. Translated by Robert P. Goldman. Clay Sanskrit Library Series. New York University Press, 2005.

Tulsidas. *The Epic of Ram, Volume I*. Translated by Philip Lutgendorf. Murty Classical Library of India. Harvard University Press, 2016.

Richman, Paula, ed. *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. University of California Press, 1991.

Richman, Paula, ed. *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*. University of California Press, 2001.

Richman, comp. and ed. *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India: An Anthology*. Indiana University Press, 2008.



Assessment and grading:

Attendance and class participation:	10%
Essay assignment:	25%
Research paper proposal:	5%
Reading responses:	20% (2 X 10%)
Research project presentation:	10%
Final research paper:	30%

Attendance and active engagement during class are crucial components of your participation in this course. For a detailed breakdown of the attendance policy, see the additional notes at the end of this syllabus. For class participation, you are expected to come prepared to discuss the reading. This means being able to summarize and discuss the readings—especially their central arguments—and ask questions based on the material. You will also submit two short responses to the readings on a day of your choice. However, one must be completed before the study break and one must be completed after.

One of the main learning outcomes of this course is to develop your research and writing skills, which is reflected in the course assignments. There is significant scaffolding for an independent research paper you will complete over the second half of the course. This process includes multiple opportunities for feedback, both from the instructor and your peers, so that the final paper is a substantial piece of writing based on original research.

Additional information and guidelines for all written assignments will be distributed throughout the term.

Assessment timeline and key dates:

Tues., Feb. 9:	Essay assignment questions made available
Mon., Feb. 22:	Essay assignment due via myCourses by 5 pm
Tues., Feb. 23:	Final week to submit the first reading response paper
Fri., March 19:	Final research paper proposals due via myCourses by 5 pm
Tues., March 30:	Final week to submit the second reading response paper
Tues., April 6, & Tues. April 13:	In-class research project presentations
Tues., April 27:	Final research papers due by 5 pm via myCourses

Schedule:

All readings should be completed by the day they are listed on the syllabus below, and must be accessible during class on the day they are listed. This counts toward a student's active participation in class. Students may use either a paper or digital copy of the readings, but

they must be easily and quickly accessible during class (and thus a PDF on a smart phone will not be sufficient!).

Also, please note that the following schedule may change slightly during the course. Changes will be announced in class and posted on myCourses.

Week One:

Tuesday, January 12: Introduction to the Rāmāyaṇa tradition

Suggested readings: *Rama*, Amar Chitra Katha comic book; “The Sanskrit Epics,” J. Brockington, pp. 116-128 in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. G. Flood

Week Two:

Tuesday, January 19: Many Rāmāyaṇas

Readings: *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, ed. P. Richman, chapter 1 (P. Richman, “Introduction”), chapter 2 (A.K. Ramanujan, “Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas”), chapter 3 (F. Reynolds, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Rāma Jātaka*, and *Rāmakien*”), chapter 4 (K. Erndl, “The Mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā”), and chapter 9 (P. Richman, “E.V. Ramasami’s Reading of the Rāmāyaṇa”)

Week Three:

Tuesday, January 26: Valmiki’s Rāmāyaṇa

Readings: Selections from Valmiki’s *Rāmāyaṇa*, trans. Goldman, Lefebvre, et al.; “Two conceptions of divinity,” A. Rao

Week Four:

Tuesday, February 2: Retelling Kamban’s Rāmāyaṇa

Readings: *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Epic (Suggested by the Tamil Version of Kamban)*, R.K. Narayan

Week Five:

Tuesday, February 9: The “Divine Lake of Rāma’s Deeds”

Readings: Selections from *The Epic of Ram, Volume I*, Tulsidas, trans. P. Lutgendorf; selections from *The Life of a Text* (chapter 1), P. Lutgendorf

Note: Essay assignment questions will be made available on this date

Week Six:

Tuesday, February 16: The life of a text: *Rāmlīlā* performance traditions

Readings: Selections from *The Life of a Text* (chapter 6), P. Lutgendorf; “An Open-Air Ramayana: Ramlila, the Audience Experience,” L. Hess; “A Ramayana on Air: ‘All in the (Raghu) Family,’ A Video Epic in Cultural Context,” P. Lutgendorf

Graduate student readings: Selections from *The Life of a Text* (chapter 2), P. Lutgendorf

Week Seven

Monday, February 22: Essay assignment due via myCourses by 5 pm

Tuesday, February 23: The *Hanumāyana*?

Readings: Selections from *Hanuman’s Tale*, P. Lutgendorf

Note: This is the final week for submitting the first reading response paper.

Week Eight:

Tuesday, March 2: NO CLASS (STUDY BREAK)

Week Nine:

Tuesday, March 9: The *Rāmāyaṇa* and Hindu Nationalism

Readings: “Militant Hinduism: Ayodhya and the Momentum of Hindu Nationalism,” J.S. Hawley; selections from *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, P. van der Veer; “We are not your monkeys,” D. Pawar, S. Bhagat, and A. Patwardhan

Graduate student reading: “Rāmāyaṇa and Political Imagination in India,” S. Pollock

Week Ten:

Tuesday, March 16: The *Sītāyana*?

Readings: *Many Ramayanas*, chapter 5 (D. Shulman, “Fire and Flood”), pp. 89-113, and chapter 6 (V. Narayana Rao, “A *Rāmāyaṇa* of Their Own”), pp. 114-136; selections from *Unearthing Gender*, S.T. Jassal

Graduate student readings, **choose one**: *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas*, ed. P. Richman, chapter 7 (Nilsson, “Grinding Millet But Singing of Sita: Power and Domination in Awadhi and Bhojpuri Women’s Songs”), or chapter 14 (Kishwar, “Yes to Sita, no to Ram: The Continuing Hold of Sita on Popular Imagination in India”)

Friday, March 19: Final research paper proposals due via myCourses by 5 pm.

Week Eleven:

Tuesday, March 23: Questioning Rāmāyaṇas

Film: In preparation for class, watch *Sita Sings the Blues* by Nina Paley (link available via myCourses)

Readings: “Deconstructing Sita’s Blues: Questions of Misrepresentation, Cultural Property, and Feminist Critique in Nina Paley’s Ramayana,” S. Lodhia; *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas: A South Asian Tradition*, ed. P. Richman, preface and chapter 1 (P. Richman, “Questioning and Multiplicity Within the Ramayana Tradition”); “Rejecting Sita: Indian Responses to the Ideal Man’s Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife,” L. Hess

Graduate student readings: *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas*, ed. P. Richman, chapter 13 (V. Narayanan, “The Ramayana and its Muslim Interpreters”)

Week Twelve:

Tuesday, March 30: Modern Tellings

Readings: Selections from *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India*, ed. P. Richman

Note: This is the final week for submitting the second reading response paper.

Week Thirteen:

Tuesday, April 6: “300 Rāmāyaṇas and Counting”: Student presentations

Note: Students will present on their research projects in class and receive feedback from their peers.

Week Fourteen:

Tuesday, April 13: “300 Rāmāyaṇas and Counting”: Student presentations and final reflections and presentations

Note: Students will present on their research projects in class and receive feedback from their peers.

Tuesday, April 27: Final research papers due by 5 pm via myCourses

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Policy statements and additional information:

The Lands and Waters on Which We Meet: McGill University is located on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg nations. These nations are hereby honoured, recognized and respected as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters on which we meet today.

Academic integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the “Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see

<http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/> for more information). It is your responsibility to educate yourself on this issue. Please do so using the resources here:
<http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/publications/>

If you still have questions regarding academic culture at McGill after reviewing these documents, you are urged to consult with the instructor personally. Any student found to have submitted plagiarised work will be referred to the Faculty Disciplinary Officer for further action, as outlined under “Academic Integrity”:

<http://www.mcgill.ca/tls/teaching/policies>

In addition, please be advised that work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text matching software within myCourses.

Language of Submission: In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives. (Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue.)

Assessment: The University Student Assessment Policy

(https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/2016-04_student_assessment_policy.pdf)

exists to ensure fair and equitable academic assessment for all students and to protect students from excessive workloads. All students and instructors are encouraged to review this Policy, which addresses multiple aspects and methods of student assessment, e.g. the timing of evaluation due dates and weighting of final examinations.

Copyright and recordings: Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

Video and audio recording of lectures and review sessions without the consent of the instructor is prohibited. Unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor, recordings of lectures and review sessions may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person, whether or not that individual is enrolled in the course.

Equal access and academic accommodations: As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities (514-398-6009).

The Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) is the unit that provides support if you feel that difficulties and impairments are hindering your academic performance while at McGill or if you require assistance with access. You should contact OSD regardless of whether the difficulties you are experiencing are permanent or temporary, and they provide

assistance to both undergraduate and graduate students. Various Health and Wellbeing resources are available at <https://www.mcgill.ca/oasis/resources/health-wellbeing>, and the OSD website is at <https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>

Course evaluations: End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student's learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

Responsibility for material: Students remain responsible for assigned material in every instance of absence. Generally I do not distribute notes or copies of PowerPoint presentations to students. I believe that note taking is an important part of the educational process, both in terms of conceptual understanding and information retention. Therefore, if you find it necessary to miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the notes from another student, after which I will be happy to review any information with you during office hours. For this reason, it is a good idea to introduce yourself to at least one other person in the class if you do not know someone already.

Schedule of readings and assignments: All reading assignments are to be completed by the class date for which they are listed and must be brought to class in either paper or digital form. The schedule of readings and lecture topics may change slightly during the course, and any such minor changes will be announced in class and posted on myCourses.

Attendance policy: Class attendance and participation are important elements of this course. Therefore, attendance is linked to your grade in the following way: Students are allowed **one** absence during the term. Subsequent absences will result in deductions from your attendance/participation grade. **Your attendance/participation grade will be lowered 2 points for each absence.** Students also are expected to attend for the entire class period. Students who leave early or arrive late may also lose points for attendance/participation.

Of course in certain specific instances an absence can be excused. **Examples of excused absences are verifiable situations that the student could not have prevented, such as jury duty, illness, medical emergencies or the funeral of a family member or friend. Religious observances also are excused absences, however the student must inform the professor of such an absence by email at least two weeks before the observance.** (For McGill's Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days, see https://mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/religious_holy_days_policy_on_accommodation_of.pdf). In all cases other than religious observances, excused absence requests require written documentation, and it remains the instructor's decision whether or not to excuse an absence, as well as how many absences will be excused (if any) for a particular situation. Please note that if the reason for your absence is not on the list above, it is likely that it will not be excused. This is why students are provided one allowable absence when they find that they must miss class for a reason that is not excused.