

**BHAKTI AND SOCIETY
Penn-in-India 2005**

(SAS 373, RELS 363)

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SOUTH ASIA STUDIES AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Course Synopsis: Within the plural religious history of India is cut a deep path of practice and literary production called “bhakti” or “personal devotion to God.” In songs and rituals participants affirm a direct relationship to their deity, often in the language of family, subservience, complaint, eroticism, and skepticism. Though the adherents of bhakti in India come from all walks of life, the literary trace of this kind of devotionism is often marked by the motifs of social suffering due to caste, gender, and class difference. In addition, the idea of social community, of sharing the burdens of life, is central to bhakti. These sentiments have been expressed for a millennium or more primarily through song and oral performance, highlighting the power of the voice to convey religious and social sentiment. As part of the Penn in India program, we will particularly investigate the principle bhakti tradition of Maharashtra, the Varkari tradition. We will also take advantage of the public culture of religion in Pune through fieldtrips and guest lectures. In addition, we will screen several films at the Film and Television Archive of India.

Requirements: You’re required to attend all classes, read all materials carefully and thoughtfully, and **engage with the subject matter in class and in your writing**. This means that during class you’re expected to participate enthusiastically and outside of class to complete your readings conscientiously. Each week you’ll be asked to compose **six reaction papers (2-3 pages)**, one for each unit, regarding your observations of culture and devotionism around you, and juxtaposing those observations with the unit's readings. At the end of the term, students will write **a ten to twelve (10-12) page ethnography paper**. Your ethnography will be conducted in Pune around a subject of your choice that deals with religion and society in some way. For students who wish to purchase a useful ethnography handbook before coming to India, I would recommend *Field Ethnography* by Paul Kutsche (Prentice Hall 1998).

Grading: Fifteen percent (30%) of your grade will depend on your attendance and the quality of your classroom participation; twenty percent (30%) will be based on the quality of your reaction papers; and forty percent (40%) will hinge on your final ethnography paper.

Books:

- Bahadur, K. P. 1998. *Bahinabai and Her Abhangas*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Chitre, D. 1991. *Says Tuka*. New Delhi: Penguin Classics.
- Hawley, J. S. and M. Juergensmeyer. 1988. *Songs of the Saints of India*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mehta, Gita. 1993[1979]. *Karma Cola*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Ramanujan, A. K. 1973. *Speaking of Shiva*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Swami Kripananda, ed. 1989. *Jnaneshwar's Gita*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Syllabus

UNIT ONE: HISTORY OF INDIAN RELIGIONS AND SOCIETY

Unit Reading: Reading: “Bhakti” by J.S. Hawley and C. L. Novetzke from *Encyclopedia Britannica*; Hawley and Jeurgensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India*, entire; *Speaking of Shiva* by A. K. Ramanujan, entire; “Part I: Images of Bhakti” in *The Embodiment of Bhakti* by K. Prentiss.

- Lecture: Indian Religious History Beginning to End of First Millennium
- Lecture: Indian Religious History Second Millennium to Present
- Lecture: Bhakti and Public Culture

UNIT TWO: JNANDEV AND MUKTABAI

Unit Reading: Selections from *Jnaneshwari*¹; Irawati Karve, “On the Road: A Maharashtrian Pilgrimage”; “The Varkaris: Following the March of Tradition,” by Michael Youngblood; selections from S. G. Tulpule on Jnandev and his siblings.

- Thesis Discussion: Is there a “Bhakti Movement”?
- Fieldtrip to Jnandev sites in Pune
- Discussion with V. L. Manjul

UNIT THREE: NAMDEV AND JANABAI; COKHAMELA AND SOYRABAI

Unit Reading: “Divining an Author: The Idea of Authorship in an Indian Religious Tradition” by C. L. Novetzke; “Janabai: A Woman Saint of India” by Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande; “The Last Kirtan of Gadge Baba,” by G. N. Dandekar; “Cokhamela and Eknath: Two *Bhakti* Modes of Legitimacy for Modern Change,” by Eleanor Zelliot in Lele, ed; “Chokhamela: Piety and Protest,” by Eleanor Zelliot (212-220); “From *Nayika* to *Bhakta*: A Genealogy of Female Subjectivity in Early Medieval India,” by Daud Ali in Leslie and McGee selections from S. G. Tulpule on Namdev and his coterie.

- Thesis Discussion: Is Bhakti a Challenge to Caste, Class, Religious, and Gender Difference?
- Fieldtrip to attend a *kirtan* [evening]
- Discussion with Ashok Kamat

UNIT FOUR: TUKARAM AND BAHINABAI

¹ I would recommend *Jnaneshwar's Gita* by Swami Kripananda (SUNY 1989), but there are many out there. Any one will do. We'll compare copies in class.

Unit Reading: Chitre, D. *Says Tuka*. Entire; "Says Tuka...Songs of a Radical Bhakta," by Gail Omvedt and Bharat Patankar; "Bahina Bai: Wife and Saint" by Anne Feldhaus; *Bahinabai and Her Abhangas* by K. P. Bahadur (1998 Munshiram Manoharlal), entire; S. G. Tulpule on Tukaram and Bahinabai

- Thesis Discussion: Is Tukaram a "Modern Poet," a "Radical Bhakta"?
- Fieldtrip to Tukaram sites in Pune
- Discussion with Dilip Chitre

UNIT FIVE: BHAKTI AND FILM

Unit Reading: Geeta Kapur, "Revelation and Doubt: 'Sant Tukaram' and 'Devi' ," in Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir, and Vivek Dhareshwar, eds., *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1993); Bhaskar, Ira. "Allegory, Nationalism and Cultural Change in Indian Cinema: Sant Tukaram," in *Literature and Theology* 12.1 (1998).

- Screening of "Tukaram" (1936 Damle, dir.; Marathi, 130mins) at Film Archives [evening]
- Screening of "Devi" (1960, Satyajit Ray, dir., Bengali, 96 mins) at Film Archives [evening]
- Discussion with Gayatri Chatterjee

UNIT SIX: CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENTS

Unit Reading: *Karma Cola*, Gita Mehta, entire; "Avatar for Our Age: Sathya Sai Baba and the Cultural Contradictions of Late Capitalism: Charisma and the Cult of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh," by Hugh Urban (73-93); "Zorba the Buddha," by Hugh Urban.

- Fieldtrip to Osho Ashram
- Fieldtrip to ISKCON Temple
- Final Discussion