

Introduction to the *Bhagavad Gītā*

Fall 2022

Time: 10-10:50

Location: Wren 2

Instructor: Akshay Gupta

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Office Hours: Monday 3-4pm, and by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The main purpose of this course is to carefully study the *Bhagavad Gītā*, one of the most influential Hindu sacred texts, in its entirety. The course's various readings will examine the historical context of the text, outline its central teachings, and probe into its various interpretations. At the end of the course, you should have an awareness of the religious significance of the *Gītā* and how it has been received and interpreted both in the East and in the West.

REQUIRED READINGS (TO BUY)

Patton, Laurie. 2014. *The Bhagavad Gita*. London: Penguin. (Kindle is a cheap option).

Schweig, Graham. 2010. *Bhagavad Gita: The Beloved Lord's Secret Love Song*. New York: HarperOne (Kindle is a cheap option).

Theodore, Ithamar. 2010. *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*. London: Routledge (a free proof copy is available at https://www.academia.edu/11304432/Exploring_the_Bhagavad_gita_Philosophy_Structure_and_Meaning. Otherwise, renting the Kindle version is a cheap option).

Theodore, Ithamar. 2020. *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction*. New Delhi: Routledge (buying the Kindle version is probably the cheapest option).

REQUIRED READINGS (AVAILABLE FREE ONLINE)

RC Zaehner's *Bhagavad Gītā*: <https://archive.org/details/20200219bhagavadgita>

There will be other readings for this course; however, you can access these for free.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There are a total of 1000 points possible in this course, allocated in the following way:

Attendance and Participation (200 points)

Regular attendance in class is mandatory. You get two “free” unexcused absences. However, every absence thereafter will deduct 10 points from your attendance and participation grade. These absences may be excused if there are good reasons for doing so (sickness, travelling for sports, doctor appointment, etc.). To get an excused absence, provide a reason for the absence and any supporting documentation if necessary. It is also expected that you will actively participate in class by asking questions, participating in discussions, making insightful comments, etc. Points will be deducted from your attendance and participation grade if you are consistently unprepared and make no contributions to group discussions.

Reflection Papers (125 x 4 = 500 points)

There will be four reflection papers throughout the semester. Each one of these papers will count for 125 points. You will reflect on the readings that we have covered since the last reflection paper (or since the start of the course in the case of the first reflection paper). You can reflect on any topic or topics of your choosing. Papers that get the full 125 points will demonstrate attentiveness to the class readings and lectures, critically analyze the *Gītā* in an insightful way, and show that you thought deeply about the course material. Topics might include: reflections on how the teachings of the *Gītā* have developed throughout the text, reflections on how the *Gītā* relates to contemporary issues, reflections on how the *Gītā* relates to other religious texts that you have encountered, reflections on how the *Gītā* might influence someone’s ethical code, reflections on what you learned in the course so far, reflections on a topic that has started to make more sense to you, reflections on some aspect of the *Gītā* that doesn’t make sense to you, and so on. You can be creative with this! Each reflection paper should be 3-4 pages doubled spaced, in Times New Roman font.

Final Paper (300 points)

There will be a 12-15 page double spaced, Times New Roman final paper that counts for 300 points. Final papers can be on any topic related to the *Bhagavad Gītā*. However, to receive the full 300 points, you should not write a paper that merely describes or summarizes the readings thus far. The best papers will engage critically with the readings and other sources relating to the *Bhagavad Gītā*. For instance, one might try to address questions like: “how do author X and author Y differ in their understanding of Z?”, “does the *Gītā* have a tension between *dharma* and *bhakti*,” or, “what are some ways that the *Gītā* could have influenced influential figures such as Mahatma Gandhi?” Reading and referencing sources that we have not covered in classes is a plus; however, it is possible to get the full points by focusing primarily on assigned readings if one’s analysis is insightful and demonstrates careful attention to the readings.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

The usage of cell phones is not permitted. Laptops are permitted provided that you use them for taking notes or to access electronic books. If your laptop use becomes distracting to the class you will no longer be permitted to use them.

ACCOMMODATIONS

It is the policy of The College of William & Mary to accommodate students with disabilities and qualifying diagnosed conditions in accordance with federal and state laws. Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2509 or at sas@wm.edu to

determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more info, please see www.wm.edu/sas.

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

It is my policy to make accommodations (i.e. exemptions from late penalties on assignments, exemptions from deductions on one's attendance/participation grade) for religious observances, as long as such practices are in accordance with state and federal regulations and consistent with safety regulations of the university. If you need accommodations, please inform me of them by the drop/add period.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Honor Code is, as always, in effect in this course. The current version of the Honor Code is available at www.wm.edu/honor. At all times, the written work you submit must be solely your own, with all sources properly cited. Instances of plagiarism will face severe punishment, including possible expulsion from the College. Plagiarism occurs when a student presents any information, ideas, or phrasing of another as if they were his or her own and does not give appropriate credit to the original source.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Unless your circumstances prevent you from turning in assignments on time, there will be a penalty for late assignments. This penalty will be 5% a day, so if you turn in a late assignment 3 days late, the highest grade you can receive for this assignment is an 85%.

THE WRITING RESOURCES CENTER

Located on the first floor of Swem Library, this is a free service provided to W&M students. Trained consultants offer individual assistance with writing, presentation, and other communication assignments at any stage, from generating ideas to polishing a final product, and across disciplines. To make an appointment, visit the WRC webpage www.wm.edu/wrc

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. I (like many people) am still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. If something is said in class (by anyone) that makes you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it.

RESPECTFUL DISCUSSION AND DIALOGUE

In our class discussions, we will explore some challenging issues and increase our understandings of different perspectives. Our conversations may not always be easy; we sometimes will make mistakes in our speaking and our listening; sometimes we will need patience or courage or imagination or any number of qualities in combination to engage our texts, our classmates, and our own ideas and experiences. Always, we will need respect for others.

WILLIAM & MARY LAND AND SLAVERY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

William & Mary acknowledges the Indigenous peoples who are the original inhabitants of the lands our campus is on today – the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway), Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Mattaponi, Monacan, Nansemond, Nottoway, Pamunkey, Patawomeck, Upper Mattaponi, and Rappahannock tribes – and pay our respect to their tribal members past and present. William & Mary acknowledges that it owned and exploited slave labor from its founding to the Civil War; and that it had failed to take a stand against segregation during the Jim Crow Era. For more information, see W&M's Decolonizing Humanities Project, www.wm.edu/sites/dhp/

THE CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY

Located at the lower level entrance of the Wesley House located off the left side parking lot at the back of house, this confidential program aims to provide W&M students, staff, and faculty with food insecurities and their dependent family members access to nonperishable and hygiene products when school is in session. If you need any accommodations to access the pantry, please call Wesley at 757-229-6832 prior to visiting the pantry, so they can provide accommodations. Campus Food Pantry webpage: <http://wmwesley.org/campus-food-pantry>

ENGLISH (AS A SECOND) LANGUAGE STATEMENT

W&M welcomes students from around the country and the world, and their unique perspectives enrich our learning community. To support students whose primary language is not English, there are a number of services available on campus. See the ESL Campus Resources webpage:

https://www.wm.edu/offices/reescenter/geo/global_programs_oncampus/english_language/ESL_Campus_Resources/Index.php#WM

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL BEING

William & Mary recognizes that students have many different responsibilities and can face challenges that make learning difficult. There are many resources available at W&M to help students. Asking for help is a sign of courage and strength. Please reach out to me if you or someone you know are facing problems inside or outside the classroom, and I will do my best to guide you to appropriate resources on campus. Those resources include:

- For psychological/emotional stress: the W&M Counseling Center (757-221-362), 240 Gooch Dr. 2nd floor, <https://www.wm.edu/offices/wellness/counselingcenter/>. Services are free & confidential.
- For physical/medical concerns: W&M Health Center (757-221-4386), 240 Gooch Dr, <https://www.wm.edu/offices/wellness/healthcenter/>
- For other additional support or resources, please contact the Dean of Students by submitting a care report (757- 221-2510) or by email at deanofstudents@wm.edu

COMMUNICATION

Throughout this course, I expect you to keep lines of communication open with me. You can always come and talk to me. Should stresses in your personal life make it difficult for you to meet the course's obligations, please communicate with me so that we can try to make reasonable arrangements to accommodate the circumstances you are facing.

COVID-19 RELATED MATTERS

Due to the continuing pandemic, flexibility may be required this semester in our modes of learning. Should you need to miss class for Covid-19 -related reasons (positive test, symptoms, etc.), communicate with me immediately letting me know about the absence. In other matters, we will make contingency plans when the need arises.

GRADING

Letter Grades (In Points)

930-1000 = A
900-929 = A-
870-899 = B+
830-869 = B
800-829 = B-
770-799 = C+
730-769 = C
700-729 = C-
670-699 = D+
630-669 = D
600-629 = D-
Below 600 = F

LAST DAY TO ADD/DROP: September 12th.

LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW: October 31st.

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 31: Introduction

Readings: Course Syllabus

September 2: Introduction to the *Bhagavad Gītā* (Schweig)

Readings: Graham Schweig's *Gītā*: Introduction (all sections)

September 5: No Class

Readings: None

September 7: Mahābhārata

Readings: Video summary of Mahābhārata: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yh4OxzEFFzA>

September 9: Introduction to the *Bhagavad Gītā* (Theodore)

Readings: Chapter 1 of Theodore's *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* ("The *Bhagavad-gītā* and its contents)

September 12: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 1

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 1

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 1

LAST DAY TO ADD/DROP (WITHDRAWAL PERIOD BEGINS ON SEPTEMBER 13TH)

September 14: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 2 Part 1

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: verses 1-38 (read explanation for verses 31-38)

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 2: (verses 1-37)

Zaehner's *Gītā*: 2.22 (verse and commentary)

September 16: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 2 Part 2

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: verses 39-72

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 2 (verses 38-72):

Zaehner's *Gītā*: 2.39 (verse and commentary)

September 19: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 3

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 3

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 3

Zaehner's *Gītā*: 3.17 (verse and commentary)

September 21: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 4

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 4

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 4

Zaehner's *Gītā*: 4.6; 4.11 (verses and commentaries)

September 23: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 5

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 5

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 5

Zaehner's *Gītā*: 5.1; 5.4; 5.29 (verses and commentaries)

September 26: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 6

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 6

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 6

Zaehner's *Gītā*: 6.30; 6.47 (verses and commentaries)

REFLECTION PAPER #1 DUE

September 28: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 7

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 7

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 7

Zaehner's *Gītā*: 7.1; 7.3; 7.19; 7.26 (verses and commentaries)

September 30: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 8

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 8

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 8

Zaehner's *Gītā*: 8.3 (verse and just the commentary on page 258); 8.4; 8.6; 8.8; 8.22 (verses and commentaries)

October 3: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 9

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 9

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 9

Zaehner's *Gītā*: 9.4 (verse and commentary)

October 5: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 10

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 10

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 10

October 7: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapters 11 and 12

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapters 11 and 12
Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapters 11 and 12

October 10: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 13

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 13
Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 13
Zaehner's *Gītā*: 13.2; 13.31 (verses and commentaries)

October 12: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 14

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 14
Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 14
Zaehner's *Gītā*: 14.27 (verse and commentary)

October 14: No Class (Fall Break)

Readings: None

October 17: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapters 15-16

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapters 15 and 16
Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapters 15-16

October 19: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 17

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 17
Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 17
Zaehner's *Gītā*: 17.23 (verse and commentary)

October 21: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 18 Part 1

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 18: verses 1-44
(read explanation of verses 18.29-44)
Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 18: verses 1-40

October 24: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 18 Part 2

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 18: verses 45-78

Laurie Patton's *Gītā*: Chapter 18: verses 41-78

October 26: Malinar

Readings: Angelika Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, chapter 4

REFLECTION PAPER #2 DUE

October 28: Schweig Post-*Gītā* Part 1

Readings: Graham Schweig's *Gītā*: "The Yoga of the *Bhagavad Gītā*," "Sanjaya: Minister and Visionary;" and "Arjuna: Warrior and Softhearted Soul,"

October 31: Schweig Post-*Gītā* Part 2

Readings: Graham Schweig's *Gītā*: "Krishna: Intimate and Infinite Divinity," and "The Secret Love Song"

LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW FROM THE COURSE AND LAST DAY FOR SOCIAL CLASS JUNIORS AND SENIORS TO ELECT PASS/FAIL

November 2: The Structure of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*

Readings: Chapter 2 of Theodore's *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* ("The Structure of the *Bhagavad-gītā*")

November 4: Vedānta

Readings: *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Vedānta*: Introduction, pages 1-8 (stop before the section Vedāntic Doxographies in Medieval India

November 7: Advaita Vedānta

Readings: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Advaita Vedānta, section 2a and 2b:

<https://iep.utm.edu/advaita-vedanta/#SH2a>

Śāṅkara's Commentary on the *Gītā*: 2.16 (verse and first paragraph of the commentary), 9.32 (verse only), 18.66 (verse and the commentary on pages 499-502 – stop before the section "Refutation of the theory that salvation is attained by works alone"). Link: <https://archive.org/details/Bhagavad-Gita.with.the.Commentary.of.Sri.Shankaracharya/page/502/mode/2up?view=theater>

November 9: Deconstruction of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*

Readings: Chapter 4 of Theodore's *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* ("Śaṅkara's Deconstruction of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* Grounded In His Preunderstanding")

November 11: Rāmānuja/Viśiṣṭādvaita

Readings: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Rāmānuja, section 2c, 2d, and 3. Link: <https://iep.utm.edu/ramanuja/#H3>

Rāmānuja's *Gītā*, verses 9.1-9.11; 9.34; 18.66 (verse and commentaries). Link here: http://www.srimatham.com/uploads/5/5/4/9/5549439/ramanuja_gita_bhashya.pdf

REFLECTION PAPER #3 DUE

November 14: Madhva/Dvaita Vedānta

Readings: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Madhva, all sections: <https://iep.utm.edu/madhva/>

Madhva's *Bhagavad Gītāi*: verses 9.8 (verse and commentary), 12.1 (verse and just the paragraph on page 177), 15.5-7 (verse and commentary on page 211), and 18.66 (verse and commentary). Link: <http://michaelsudduth.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Madhvacarya-Bhagavad-Gita.pdf>.

November 16: Prabhupāda/Acintya Bhedābheda

Readings:

Prabhupāda's *Gītā*: verse 9.4 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/4/>; verse 9.5 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/5/>; verse 9.6 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/6/>; verse 9.9 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/9/>; verse 9.10 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/10/>; verse 9.29 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/29/>

November 18: Philosophy and Interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gītā*

Readings: Chapter 3 of Theodore's *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* ("Bhagavad-gītā Its Philosophy and Interpretation")

November 21: No Class (AAR)

Readings: None

November 23: No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Readings: None

November 25: No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Readings: None

November 28: *Bhagavad Gītā* and Spiritual Equality

Readings: “Cows, Elephants, Dogs, and Other Lesser Embodiments of *Ātman*” and “Constructing a Hindu Black Theology”

November 30: *Bhagavad Gītā* and Caste

Readings: Caste and Devotion: A Casteless Framework for (Some) Forms of Hindu Devotionalism

December 2: *Bhagavad Gītā* and Eco-Theology

Readings: “The Green *Gītā*: Connecting Ontology, Soteriology, and Environmental Ethics”

December 5: Review

Readings: None

REFLECTION PAPER #4 DUE

December 7: Review

Readings: None

December 9: Review

Readings: None

FINAL PAPER IS DUE DECEMBER 15TH AT 11:59 PM